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ABSTRACT

Written from the perspective of a Montessori preschool director, teacher educator, and father, this book presents basic information on child development from the prenatal period through the school years, highlighted by stories of child development in different cultures. The book is presented in three parts. Part 1 focuses on the "explosions and transformations" during pregnancy, infancy, and toddlerhood, including discussion of the sensitive periods described by Maria Montessori. This part also discusses the importance of bonding and emotional support, aspects of infant care and the home environment, ways to record observations of the infant and toddler, the growth of independence and self-control during toddlerhood, and selecting a preschool. Part 2 focuses on the preschool period, with the primary themes of emotional and social development, the child's self-construction, and cognitive development. Part 3 deals with the school years and addresses working in groups, the transition to reasoning, the role of competition, parents' role, parent participation in children's schooling, and the home environment. (Contains 28 references.) (KB)

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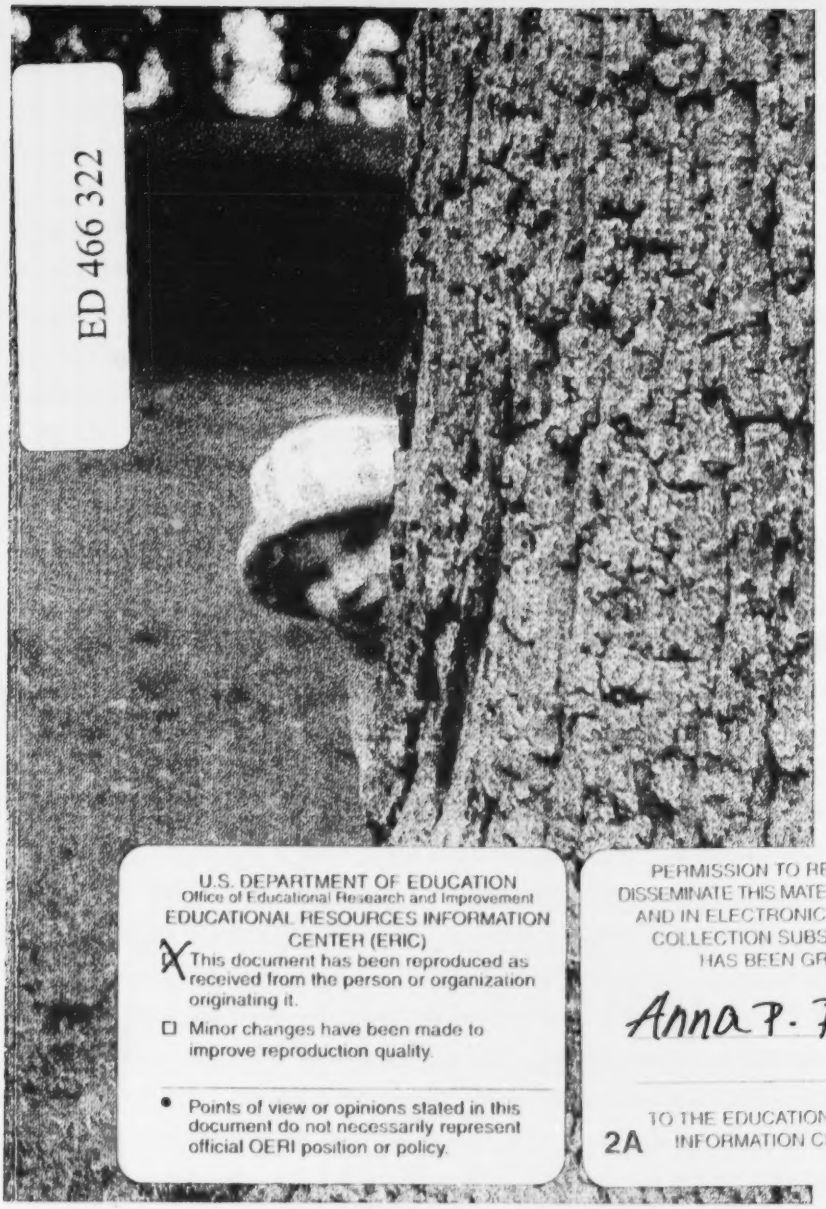

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The Child: What Every Caring Parent Needs To Know

by Desmond Perry
Director of Meca-Seton
a Montessori Teacher Education Program

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Desmond Perry, born in Dublin, Ireland, studied in Ireland and travelled throughout Western Europe during his early years. After a stint in West Africa, where he says the people taught him much more than he taught them, including their language and much of their ancient culture, he came to Chicago to complete his masters. There he met and married Celma Pinho, a Brazilian from Rio de Janeiro who prepares teachers in the Montessori method of education. Together they direct Pre Schools (and a Teacher Education Center) in Chicago and lecture internationally. Their two children are now grown up. Celma and Desmond spend some time each year in Brazil and Ireland.

The Child: What Every Caring Parent Needs To Know

by Desmond Perry

Meca-Seton
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The Child: What Every Caring Parent Needs to Know lives up to the promise of its title. It should be required reading for every prospective parent, current parent, and grandparent of this new millennium's children!

This is an unusual book. Authored by a man, it brings a unique perspective to the examination of children's development. As a parent of two daughters, now young adults, Desmond Perry has combined his own personal knowledge of fatherhood with the experience of observing and working with children in a school setting. This happy combination offers the reader a rich, broad and down-to-earth view of children's developmental journey and the adult's role in it.

The subheadings of the book's sections, "Explosions and Transformations", "Cruising on a Magic Carpet" and "Getting Down to Work" provide glimpses, not only of the changing characteristics and needs of children at different ages, but also of the gentle humor that this Irish father has brought to his understanding of the parental task. His interpretation of the child as lover, worker, thinker, and leader gives us new insights into the child's responses to the varying demands of an ever-expanding personal world.

His low-key, knowledgeable approach to understanding children provides a different and refreshing guidebook for those on that universal quest of parents to be both loving and responsible mentors to their own children.

Margaret Howard Loeffler, Ph.D.
Child Development Consultant

"What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?"

Shakespeare – Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2.

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Babies and Toddlers – Explosions and Transformations

Chapter 1 *Pregnancy and the Impact of Birth*

On the broad plain bordering the Adriatic, just north of the town that was then called Ariminium, an insignificant stream threads its way through the marshes to the sea. In 49 B.C. it marked the border of Cisalpine Gaul and the Roman Republic ruled by Pompeii and the Senate. One wintry day in that year Gaius Julius Caesar came with his legions fresh from the conquest of Gaul and Britain, crossed the stream and thus began his overthrow of the republic and his eventual rise to dictator. The river was called the Rubicon, and ever since, crossing the Rubicon has symbolized a transition, a crossing over from one state of life to something very different.

Beginning To Plan

Being told you are going to be a parent is like crossing your own personal Rubicon. Being married is great; having a baby makes things serious. What will have to change? Will we have to reevaluate all our lifetime habits? Forget about smoking, and get on the wagon? Cut back on both our social lives? Is this the time to settle down and become a sensible citizen? Get a dog and a cat and a two-car garage and move to the suburbs? What will happen in terms of jobs, careers, insurance, housing?

How can we be present to the everyday life of this child? Do we start saving now for college? Harvard or Yale? Women get pregnant in the belly. Men get pregnant in the head. Once the realization dawns that he has to be a dad, the father will spend many wakeful hours wondering what this child will be like, and imagining how he will take care of him . . . or her . . . or them?

To get myself ready for the birth of my own child, I called a female relative with three children of her own to ask for help and

advice. Among other things, she told me she had given away all the baby clothes and furniture she had accumulated. Oops! Then the following week she called me back because she had just learnt, to her utter surprise, that she herself was pregnant, after seven years since her last child. "What'll you do?" I asked. "Just grin and bear it--he will grin and I'll bear it." As I put down the phone I thought "Not much help there!"

I went back to the school where I taught, and one of the first conversations I heard was a five year old and her friends discussing the upcoming birth of her baby brother. "You see, my mommy is cooking the baby in her tummy, and when he is cooked he'll come out and play with me." Of course! It's really very simple! At least we would have nine months or so before this baby was cooked!

Nature is very kind, in giving parents time enough to prepare for one of the great occasions in their lives--the birth of a child. I am often impressed by how radiant expectant mothers become at this time. Nature is telling us that something important is happening, and we had better prepare ourselves.

A first pregnancy is a good occasion to strengthen the marriage by serious conversation about: how to act with regard to discipline; how to be authoritative without being tyrannical; how to share the chores and responsibilities that go with childcare; how to spend leisure time and vacation times that include the young child; how to avoid using TV and videos as the chief babysitter; how to build up our extended family and friends as a network of support.

Brain Development in the Fetus

What is actually happening with this baby during the long months of pregnancy? Research in neuroscience is revealing more and more clearly how the brain undergoes massive development, beginning from the very early weeks after conception. Over one billion neurons--the nerve cells that are the raw material of the brain--are produced every three days, so that when the child is born, the brain has about 100 billion neurons, some already wired together to form the centers for hearing, seeing, touching, taste and

smelling, and to form the connections to the emotional center, the amygdala, and the control center in the cortex, where understanding is located. The genetic inheritance lays down the main lines of this complex development. The process, like creating a telephone switchboard powered by billions of computer chips all wired together, is only partially complete by the time the child is born. Development will continue after birth, but it is the child's interaction with the environment that will then determine the outcome.

Effects of Alcohol and Tobacco

One should learn about the effects of alcohol and drugs, including tobacco, on the fetus. The choice is very clear. You can choose alcohol and smoking, or you can choose pregnancy. You may not do both, in fairness to your unborn child. The effects of narcotics other than alcohol and tobacco are even more disastrous for the fetus. It takes an adult to raise a child and pregnancy is the final chance for both parents to grow up, to meet the strains and stresses that go along with the joys of being a father and a mother.

Housebuilding

It's somewhat like building a house. The foundation is the trust and love and confidence that the parents invest in each other. The walls are the daily compromises and arrangements and accommodations that they make with one another. When foundations and walls are strong enough to take the stress, they are ready for the "roof", the children, who put a certain stress on the marriage but also act to strengthen it.

For equipping yourself to be a parent it helps to be a handy man (or woman) about the house – to be able to fix a leaky toilet or loosen a window that sticks. What helps even more is to know some basics about child development, both during pregnancy and after the child is born. We need to follow the stages of pregnancy carefully, monitor the health of the mother. If there are any problems discuss the possible decisions that must be made as early as possible--so that life decisions are not put off until the hurried moments after labor begins. The healthy nutritional and lifestyle

habits of the mother are crucial. The natural forces at work are strong. Brain development of the fetus may be harmed by exposure to viruses and contagious diseases. It is important to cooperate with nature. A friend of our family, Cele Bona, wrote a beautiful poem about this stage of adult life, called 'The Children's House':

> "What is the house we must build for our children?
> The house we must build is us.
> Our attitude.
> Our knowledge.
> Our desire to understand their growth.
> Our love.
> The house where our children most abide is us."

The Marital Conversation

In my work with children and parents I have too often seen deep divergences of opinion between parents on questions related to the care of their child. One parent is permissive, unstructured, while the other is overly structured and a perfectionist. One parent believes in monitoring every activity of the child, while the other wants only to give guidelines. These kinds of radical differences need to be worked out by the couple in what sociologist Peter Berger calls the "ongoing marital conversation." Even before marriage a couple needs to agree on issues like whether to have children, how many children are enough, spacing between children, as well as divorce and abortion. If they then agree to marry and have children, the "conversation" should go on to discuss what child-drearing methods to use, the role of the father and of the mother, attitudes to friends and family, and how to keep the "magic" in the marriage, even after several children. A successful marriage with a good ongoing "conversation" will change both partners, so that there is a certain understanding, if not complete unanimity on all the important questions (except perhaps on which way to vote in elections!)

Breast Feeding and Sex Determination

I lived for some years among the Anang and Ibibio of Nigeria,

in West Africa. They believed strongly in fortifying mothers-to-be with good nutrition. Babies were breast fed for at least a year after birth. In an area where tropical diseases were endemic, the babies were probably the healthiest segment of the population. The Ibibio believe that if a mother has three or four girls in a row it is "her fault." (Boys are more desired than girls, partly for economic reasons.) Such women are often divorced and go back to live with their parents. When a doctor of my acquaintance revealed that science had proved that the sex of the child is determined by the father, not the mother, he was met by widespread skepticism from the men, even those with a university education. The women, on the other hand, quickly realized that this discovery was liberating for them, as it shifted the burden of responsibility to the husbands. As one involved in education, I learnt much more than I taught in West Africa.

Siblings and the Newborn

If there are older children in the house they need to be enlisted early on as part of the support network--tell them what is happening and how they can help.

I went once to a lecture by Dr. Lee Salk, the author of a lovely book called, "How to Raise a Human Being." A woman in the audience asked about sibling rivalry and I always remember his reply. "Look, how would you feel if one day your husband said 'I love you a lot, but I really need a younger person in my life. She will take up a great deal of my time, but I will try to make time for you, too'. In effect, that is what we tell our older children when a new baby comes home."

In order to involve the siblings and get them to "own" the new baby we may enlist them to teach the newborn how to talk and sing, how to play games like "peek-a-boo," how to help get her back to sleep. When it is time to introduce siblings to the newborn, whether at home or at the hospital, it is a good idea to let Dad hold the baby while Mom takes care of the older children. We need every bit of our tact and diplomacy. Involving siblings in welcoming the new arrival is just the start of a long process. But during pregnancy is the right time to begin.

Birth and the Newborn

Many African tribes impose a form of curfew on newborns and their mothers where they have to wait for a week or two before they can emerge from the birth-house and present the new arrival to the community. Jewish and Christian traditions also have this idea of waiting awhile before initiation by circumcision or baptism. In many places there is a wait of at least a month so that the whole family can gather all the friends and relatives and throw a really great party.

A Brazilian Story

There is a Brazilian story of one of these great party bashes that was becoming unruly. There seemed to be far too many uninvited guests drinking like mad and misbehaving. So the oldest friend of the family grabs a loudspeaker and announces "Will everyone from the bride's side come over here, please, and everyone from the groom's side step over there." The crowd divides obediently. The friend grins with satisfaction, and shouts "Now, all you party-crashers, take yourselves off. Today we're celebrating a baptism, not a wedding!"

Stimulus Barrier

It is interesting to note that the newborn child has the benefit of a stimulus barrier which insulates her from excessive stimuli and allows her to coast along using unconscious reflexes, like sucking, grasping, rooting for the breast or nipple; meanwhile the brain is reorganizing itself to process all the new information coming in from the senses.

Critical Periods-Sensitive Periods

Early in the 20th Century Dr. Maria Montessori lectured and wrote extensively about her discovery, through scientific observation, of sensitive periods in children. These are periods in the young child's life when he is unconsciously driven to acquire certain skills and experience. Her observations were inspired by the discovery, of ethologists like de Vries and Konrad Lorenz, of

critical periods in the life-cycles of birds and insects. I have seen pictures of Lorenz, who won a Nobel Prize for his work, leading a flock of greylag goslings across a field, feeding bucket in hand. He had used their critical period for bonding and they imprinted on him, the nearest large moving object, as their parent; so they followed him everywhere.

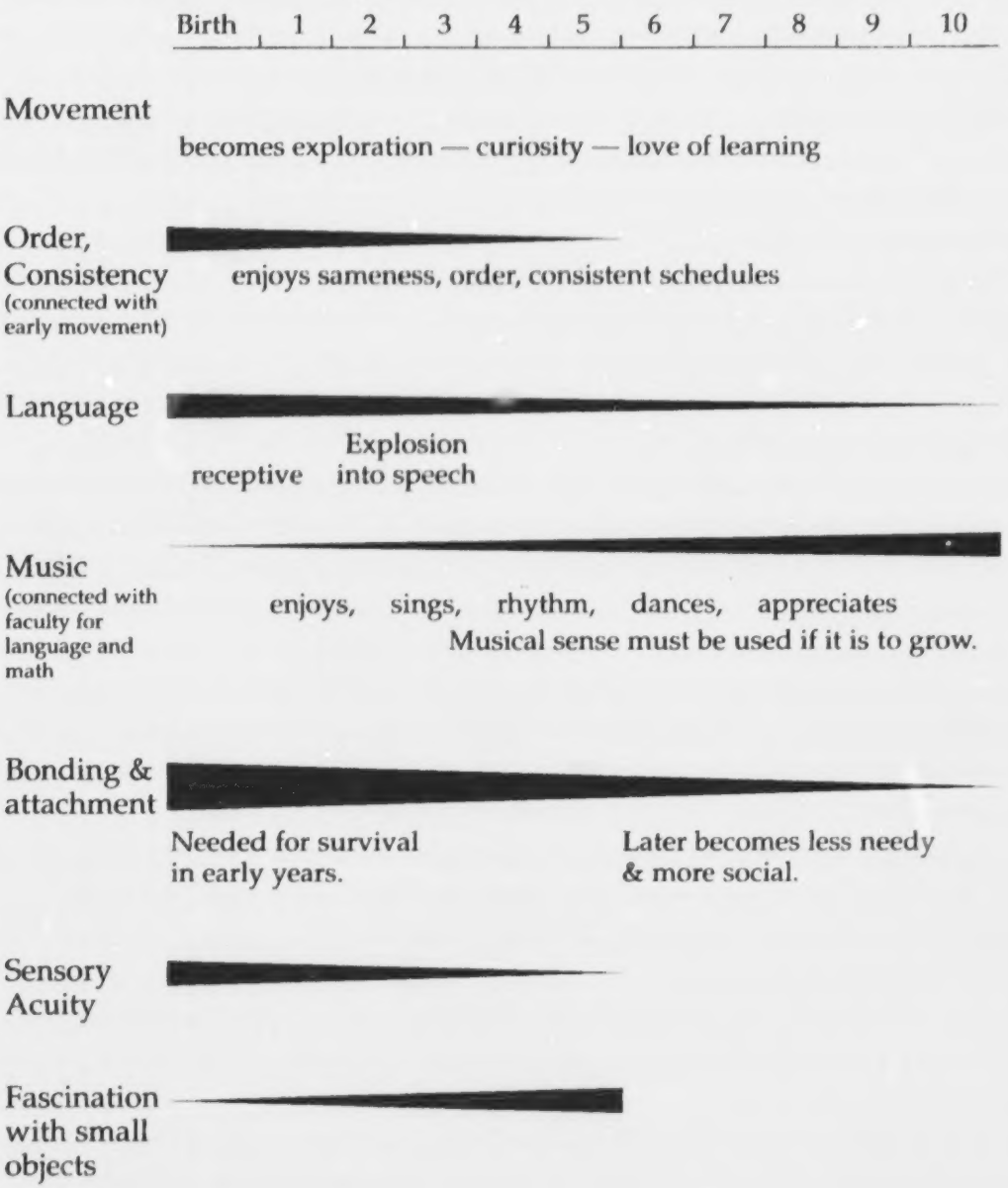
The sensitive periods in children begin at birth, with movement and language. The child is driven to develop himself by moving (the hands, the feet, eye-hand coordination) and by sensitivity to language (turning the head only days after birth toward the sound of a human voice).

These sensitivities to movement and language soon become elaborated into sensitive periods for bonding and social attachment (another tool for survival); for music, for order and for consistency, and sensorial acuity. These periods unfold in a fairly predictable sequence, flourish for a while and then are gone forever. A child engaged in tasks that meet these inner needs becomes concentrated and relaxed--what Montessori calls "normalized".

It is extremely interesting that neuroscientists have just recently, in the 1980s and 90s become aware of the same phenomenon in the children they studied. Once they were able to map the brain's activity before birth and during the early years, they could study the intense work going on in the various segments of the brain--those devoted to languages and motor skills, music, social attachments, visual and auditory acuity. They call these biologically driven active periods "windows of opportunity." Just like Montessori and her followers, they have begun to question the educational establishment for ignoring these windows through the use of workbooks instead of hands-on materials for subjects like language skills, number and geometric skills; for waiting to teach a second language until age 13 or 14, after the window of opportunity is tightly closed; and for relegating subjects like motor development and music to unimportant places in the curriculum, though so much depends on them. More than two millennia ago Plato wrote that "Musical training is a more potent instrument than any other for education", in artistic discrimination, in reasoning and in ethics. [Plato, Republic III, 401b] The neuroscientists of our day have come full circle back to Plato's teachings, and they

add that because the music center in the brain is so close to that for logic and mathematical reasoning, there is probably an intimate connection between the two. Montessori's Chart of Sensitive Periods and the neuroscientists' "Windows of Opportunity" are practically identical.

Sensitive Periods – Birth to Ten Years


Birth 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Movement
becomes exploration — curiosity — love of learning
Order, Consistency
(connected with early movement)
enjoys sameness, order, consistent schedules
Language
receptive
Explosion into speech
Music
(connected with faculty for language and math
enjoys, sings, rhythm, dances, appreciates
Musical sense must be used if it is to grow.
Bonding & attachment
Needed for survival in early years.
Later becomes less needy & more social.
Sensory Acuity
Fascination with small objects

In order for these windows of opportunity to be used, parents provide the environment and the interaction, but the child does all the work. The more he works and is allowed to keep on working, the better he develops.

Chapter 2 *Infancy From Birth to 15 Months*

One of my favorite quotes from Erickson, in "Dimensions of a New Identity", is this: "What brings us closer together is the nakedness and helplessness of the newborn child . . . Once the newborn is here, and is able to survive at all, there must be a certain well-delineated environment of care adapted to the stages of human growth."

Whenever I think of what happens inside the brain of the newborn child, I am reminded of the launching of a spacecraft and experiencing that tremendous thrusting 'whoosh' followed by a series of explosions as the rocket first lifts off and then discards the booster stages. The input of all the senses--touch, taste, smell, hearing and vision provides the brain with an enormous load of fresh information. The baby's nervous system springs into action and multiplies itself to absorb and classify this new input. Neurons, axons and dendrites--the communication system of the brain--crackle into frantic activity so that within weeks the child discards the unconscious reflexes (which serve while the stimulus barrier operates) and moves into more and more conscious and purposeful sucking and tasting, grasping and batting at interesting toys and other objects, moving hands and feet close to the eyes and mouth so they can be examined carefully; focussing on objects close by, like the mother's face during feeding, and later on objects further away.

Visual Acuity

Many parents recall being somewhat upset by the tendency of the newborn's eyes to stare and then lose focus and wander off, each in a different direction. Within a few months, however, the eyes learn to focus, even on distant objects. I remember being

deeply impressed when our first child was four months old. I brought her to look out the window of an upstairs apartment, where there was a glorious view of the ocean, the beach and a nearby town. She showed utter pleasure and fascination at all the sights to be seen – children running into the water, a car passing on the street, the ocean sparkling in the sun. When someone called me and I made to move away, she protested loudly at being deprived of these delightful new sights and sounds. I had to excuse myself and stay there until she was satisfied.

Bonding and Emotional Support

We know that bonding and attachment are the order of the day so we take the initiative in giving plenty of time to the newborn, allowing him to stare his fill during feeding, talking with him in the way of all new parents, using a high-pitched voice and a playful manner. Some babies are just naturally huggable and kissable – you can see their eyes light up when hugs and kisses are on the agenda. Others are slower and need encouragement. Let them expect a little loving at certain times--on waking up or going to sleep, after bathtime, or diapering. It is surprising how even the most lethargic, solemn little ones are energized and warmed up by the simplest show of affection. It is not a substitute for normal health care – doctor visits, proper feeding, taking care of problems – but the psychosomatic benefits are dramatic and healthgiving. When the love we show our infant is dependable and consistent he is able to devote his best efforts to his proper work of self-development. When we mirror our child's emotions as they occur – feelings of amazement, hurt and fear, or joy at meeting again, we are validating his feelings by sharing them with him. Watch out for the baby's first smile (or is it just gas?), his attempts to talk back to us in coos and gurgles and his first try at rolling over. We stimulate his efforts by our appreciation.

Schedules

We gradually move him towards a more regular schedule of sleeping through the night by giving him plenty of playful daylight activity. It is a bit like learning to dance – either partner can

lead at times. We sometimes follow the baby's lead and play when he wants to play, sleep when he wants to sleep; he too will sometimes follow our lead, especially if we carefully keep his sleeping area dark at night and at naptimes, and well lit during the hours of daytime activity.

Toys – Bed

As soon as the baby can roll over it is time to think about having a low bed for him, with a mattress close to the floor, on top of a carpeted or cushioned area. When the child tries to move, encourage him by placing a loved toy or attractive object just beyond reach and wait to see what happens. We want to encourage, not frustrate, so if the child is not yet ready to make the effort we must be patient. Time enough for creeping and walking. Stimulate your child's sense of touch by having toys of different textures and a variety of shapes. They will all go into his mouth, so make sure they are washable, and large enough to create no danger of swallowing.

Language

Talk about everything the child does, sing a little and begin to practice your nursery songs and rhymes. If you happen to read a book while your child is calm, and awake, read aloud to him. It is the music of language he wants to hear – the rhythms and patterns of speech that we use unconsciously. He is not yet able to appreciate the content of what is spoken.

As your baby's vocalizing gets more organized, around five months, it's time to think about games with the tongue, lips and teeth (the mechanisms of speech). Stick out your tongue briefly and laugh. Blow with your lips, or even whistle. Make an o of astonishment with your lips.

You can even try these games with a baby who stares at you in a restaurant. If the baby responds you will have an interesting meal, swapping baby stories with other parents.

When your baby babbles, saying "baa baa baa" you can throw in a variation –baa boo boo!" or –laa laa loo!" and watch how she perks up.

Carrying the Baby

When our babies were little I remember often bringing them for walks though a little village in Brazil, slung in front when very small, and in a backpack after eight months. In the 1970s this was a novelty and everyone we met had questions, what was this? Why did we do it? Does the baby like it? Every day the questions kept coming, from young and old, until the novelty wore off. The babies were fascinated each in their turn, to watch the fishermen prepare their catch of bass, grouper and snapper for sale on marble slabs, selling shrimp and crabs by the bucket; or to listen to us bargaining in Portuguese with the market women, whose stalls were a medley of colorful fruits – vegetables and mangos, papayas, eggplant, yams, and a blend of delicious smells.

Walking through the village was the high point of the day for the babies. After that they slept well, giving those active brains a chance to rest and recuperate. We thought of what Montessori wrote, in "Education for a New World", "It is a mistake to seclude the child in a nursery, a sort of prison. Happier is the child who goes everywhere with his mother, in streets and market, in trains and buses listening and looking, storing up impressions of intense interest, and secure all the time in the care of his natural protector."

Second Language

If one or both parents has a second language it is time to consider how to teach the second language while maintaining English. Babies can easily absorb two or three languages just by hearing them spoken. The second language will be more easily maintained if the child has frequent access to a community where it is used on a daily basis. If there is no language community nearby the child will understand the second language but seldom use it.

I have seen a case where a Polish speaking grandmother and her friends passed on the language to her grandchildren when she baby sat, even though the children's parents never spoke Polish. I discovered this one day when one of the boys, aged three, threatened to kick my dupa if I would not give back his toy at once!

A second language is an enrichment, a window on another way of life. It is a shame to let it go for want of a small effort.

Travelling With a Baby

Travelling with a baby is an education in itself. You quickly learn which airlines and hotels are baby-friendly. Celma's family lives in Rio, mine in Dublin, and we can't say enough good things about the kindness and humanity of the employees of Varig and Aer Lingus. On an airline, especially an overnight flight, everything is new and strange for the baby and you need not be surprised if she fusses. It helps to create your own stimulus barrier, lower lights and cocoon your child's ears with a blanket during take-off and landing, make sure she is dry and then try to compose yourself and the baby for sleep, or at least for a nap. Even when the baby is physically sick or uncomfortable, your calmness will communicate itself to her. Going to hotels and restaurants with a baby is another educational process. If they cannot make baby beds or high chairs available, think about turning around and going elsewhere. Better still, check it out when you make a reservation. When buying or renting a car, make sure that the baby seat fits safely in a rear seat and that it can be removed easily for carrying the baby.

Swimming

When your baby is newborn there is a swimming reflex. Like all the reflexes it fades away in a couple of months. Sit with your baby on your lap in a bath with warm water. Gradually let him relax in the water, and let him float, while keeping his head above water. Play with your baby making sure it is an enjoyable experience. When babies are very young they like being in water close to body temperature. As they get older their tolerance for colder or hotter water increases.

In many places special baby swim classes are offered, beginning at about six months of age. They usually involve the parents getting in the water with the baby and showing the baby how to float, how to hold his breath when underwater, and then swimming underwater from one parent to another, with a little push. Precautions must be taken against ear infections. If both parents feel comfortable in the water the baby will react positively and will learn very fast. If they do not feel comfortable it is really better to

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postpone learning to swim until two years of age or later, when they can take swim lessons without the parents. Swimming gives a young child a new sense of competence and self-esteem and can be helpful to the overall development of the child. But if you do no more than accustom your child to being in the water and enjoying the experience you have given him a good boost.

The Home Environment – Safety

As soon as the child begins to creep and crawl your whole living-space becomes his playpen, and you must be sure it is safe for him. Make a checklist of what must be done now and what can wait until he walks upright – things like:

1) Cover all electric outlets
2) Remove extension cords from easy access
3) Remove cleaning materials and medicines from closets with easy access
4) Is the kitchen safe? Everything hot out of reach?
5) Are bathrooms safe? Replace locks on doors with a small bolt, 5 feet off the floor. Any cords e.g. hair-dryers, dangling?
6) Put in storage anything valuable or breakable, and any furniture items that can be pushed over.

Sit on the floor in each room and look at it from a creeper's point of view. You will come up with plenty of ideas. When he can walk, go through the whole process again.

It is easy to teach a creeper how to negotiate stairs – you just turn him around at the top and let him come down backwards. As soon as they can use the stairs you need to be there.

Grasping and Releasing

Your child will love opening drawers and decorating himself with your underwear, or clashing all the pots and pans in the kitchen. As he learns how to grasp and release, he will practice his release mechanism by dropping cups, plates, food, anything in

reach, onto the floor, and then expect you to replace these items at once so he can repeat the exercise. If the house that has a baby is rather untidy, that's normal. If it is very tidy, then you need to worry.

The Home Environment – Beauty and Harmony

And that brings us on to the question of aesthetics. Since your child's brain is literally like a sponge, soaking up impressions, we need to make our home as pleasing to the senses as possible, calm, peaceful, harmonious, uncluttered. Make sure the baby sometimes hears music with these qualities. Is the house full of delicious smells near mealtimes? Are the floors clean enough for a creeper-crawler to roll on? Is there time to appreciate all these good things? Babies need a slowed-down pace so they can fully savor this new life. Often we need to slow down as well. And think about walking upstairs or to the next room to talk to your spouse, instead of calling out, to save a few steps. Good behavior and good manners are caught, not taught. Loud voices in the home often give wrong messages to babies.

To develop properly, babies need to be active and fearless. Dead time, in a crib or a playpen or in front of a TV during the hours of wakeful activity, is time stolen from the child. Feeding the baby can be fun and stimulating, when we stay close and allow him to stare and explore our face. It is not a good idea to prop a bottle for self-feeding. We talk and we sing, we smile and we laugh. It is more than a biological function, it is a time to enjoy being together. Even something as mundane as changing diapers can be a time for fun, like singing a special song. You do not know any diaper-changing song? Try, to the tune of "Clementine" – "I'm a wet thing, I'm a wet thing, I'm a wet thing through and through! I would rather be a dry thing, now I'm dry again, like you." It's not great poetry, so if you can improve on it, feel free. It does transform a necessary chore into a stimulating experience, gives us adults a little fun, and gives the child a time for one-to-one relationships.

The Music of Language

We were seated in a busy restaurant near the entrance to the men's room; and my child had decided to say her first word, not to us, but to the men who passed by our table. With a big smile and a wave she greeted each one – "Hi!" Some of the men hurried on by, but most responded and greeted her back. Her second word was her version of the Portuguese word for pacifier, chupeta, which made her mother ecstatic. She was just under twelve months old, and a few weeks earlier we had come to realize that she understood a good deal of what we were saying. When we said something like "where is the doggie" she would turn her head to look for the dog.

Like parents everywhere we thought she was excessively clever, a genius in fact, but when I looked it up in the child development manuals she was right there in the middle of what was normal.

The vocalizing and babbling that goes on while the baby is little shows us that the child is getting his speech apparatus up to speed. When understanding dawns and he realizes that words can get a reaction, the words start to tumble out, first one at a time, then in two word sentences. But, in the baby months, it is the music of language that is all-important – the rhythms and the pitch and the way sounds run together. This becomes the raw material of their vocalizing. Our part is to let him hear plenty of talk; talking to him, to siblings, to other adults, reading to him from picturebooks, even doing our own reading out loud.

The Language of Music

Slow down your songs, when you sing to your baby. When speaking makes no impression try singing your words, or singing as you describe what is happening. "I'm coming to see my baby, is he awake or asleep? I'm coming to see his button nose, and I think he's a little wet" etc., etc. Nursery rhymes and traditional baby songs are among the easiest ways of sharing language and cultural heritage. If you can't remember them, there are plenty of excellent children's books, containing the words and attractive pictures. No tape, CD or other media can replace your voice and your inter-

action as you sing to and along with your child.

The Baby's Room

Before your baby is born, start preparing a room that is simple, cheerful and easily kept clean. Here are a few principles to keep in mind while you plan.

- Research shows that babies are most interested in pictures of human faces.
- The colors you choose affect mood and can promote a calm peaceful outlook.
- Natural materials are preferable to man made fabrics and plastic.
- Furniture should be child-sized. A one year old should be able to open the drawers.
- The environment should be beautiful and artistic.
- It should be orderly with a place for everything and not too much of anything.
- It should invite movement and activities during the baby's waking hours.
- A low bed or a mattress on the floor laid on top of a soft rug is a good idea as it develops independent, free movement.
- A few simple toys with a variety of textures--wood, metal, wool and cotton – one or two for grasping; one or two for rolling and pushing – a ball and a truck; and one or two for cuddling – a teddy bear and a human-looking doll.
- Make sure the room can be darkened at will, as this makes it easier to sleep and to take naps even during daylight.

Pets

One last remark about your young child's environment. Pets like dogs and cats can be a real help when you have young children. The ideal would be to get a young animal to grow up with your child. The inevitable experimenting, pushing and pulling is more readily tolerated by a puppy or a kitten. As young children

grow they have a willing playmate available at all times, who will lick their bruises and keep their secrets. If your lifestyle allows it, your child will benefit. Birds, too can make good pets, and even a goldfish, although harder to relate to, is nice to observe.

Recording Observations

Your baby changes a little everyday and it is a good idea to record what happens both pictorially and in writing. Keep a camera handy and look for the big events – the early smiles, rolling over, sitting up, creeping, cruising upright using the furniture, a look of surprise on meeting grandma, playing with the dog, a day at the shore, bathtime, the first tooth. An album of the first fifteen months is fun to make. Write the date and some details on the back of each photograph. If you use a videocamera try to mention the context – where and when the shot was taken.

For really serious study of your child there is a technique for scientific observation, that is easy to use,

1) Clear your mind of distractions. Focus only on the child.
2) Focus on facts alone, rather than feelings or judgements.
3) Pick one aspect of your child's development, like movement or language, or changing preferences in toys, and record as many facts as possible. Do this over some weeks before analyzing or drawing conclusions. It will help you to understand the child's growing and changing needs.

Building An Extended Family

As your baby grows, she needs to be introduced to life, to adults other than the parents and even to other babies. Before the baby's birth you need to involve yourself with your own family members if they live nearby, with other parents who might cooperate with us in sharing childcare on occasion, and with potential nannies and babysitters who could provide even long-term care if needed. The child needs contact with more than the father and mother and parents need some time to be by themselves. It is very unwise to leave your child in the care of people you do not know well. Taking care of your baby is never simply a contract relationship – at so much per hour. You need to visit around, long

before the need arises, with local groups, parent co-operatives, and parent-child classes, whether or not you have family members who can help out. Leaving your baby for long periods in the care of somebody else requires trust on both sides. This trust is built up only by getting to know your sitter very well, as a friend. If you feel you are unable to trust the sitter with your baby it is wiser to follow your feelings and make other arrangements. Since nannies and long-term babysitters often come from foreign countries they usually need friendship and respect. If you can provide these things you can truly build up an extended family situation, where your baby benefits from a widening of the family. All parents, but especially working parents and single parents, need the help of the wider community. Knowing what is available and building up a network of support takes time and trouble and rethinking, but it is well worth the effort.

Chapter 3 *The Toddler: 15 to 30 months.*

With that sixth sense that parents of young children develop, I woke up to hear a door banging shut. Something made me race downstairs and look out the front door. There was my older child, aged sixteen months, striding out in the spring sunshine, stark naked. Quickly I scooped her up and carried her back indoors. Then I began to plan a better lock on the front door, placed up high where she could not reach. Realization dawned that the strategies of the first 15 months would not work any longer. To complicate the issue, number two was already on the scene, sleeping in the bassinet beside her mother.

What is happening with the toddler? The explosions of the early months continue – explosions into walking, running, climbing – explosions into talking, singing, shouting – explosions into independence and self-will.

Walking

When children first walk they enjoy it a great deal. They often walk with their heads up and their eyes cast upward as though to

thank God or contemplate the sun, moon and stars. The result is they fall down a lot, but being close to the ground they start back up again, and again they collide with the furniture or anything else in their path. When they first run they cannot turn or stop – they just run out of steam. Soon they learn to control their movements better and within a few months they can run, turn and stop when it is appropriate.

They are tireless and can go on quite long walks – over a mile, if we pace it properly. They do not walk as we do, with a destination in mind. They walk for pleasure, and stop to talk to an insect, to pet a doggie or to examine the fallen leaves. With toddlers we do not lead. We follow along and monitor for safety. A visit to the park is the best gift for our toddler. It should be a daily gift, in rain or shine, even in snowy weather. Children should feel what weather is like, hot or cold, wet or dry.

The Brain

The brain is still constructing itself, forging new connections in response to new experiences. When walking and talking are well under way, after 24 months, the rate slows down somewhat. But it is still true to say that the brain constructs itself through the child's movement experiences – running, walking, climbing; and fine motor experience – and the child's experience of language and music. The other prerequisite for brain development is that the emotions remain on a fairly even keel. All of this development requires that we parents provide the right emotionally supportive and physically stimulating environment. "Peek-a-boo", ball games and "I'm going to get you" are good games to play for building the child's concepts. When playing ball with your toddler the ball will seldom be caught, and it usually will be thrown backwards or in the wrong direction. Lots of patience and lots of practice and he may yet play ball for the Dodgers, but just now, anything goes.

Swimming For Tots

Swimming is a great experience for toddlers. Find a pool that is warm enough. Let the child be your guide as you enter the water together. Let her play and splash. Invite her to go further, but never

force. Having a pleasant experience is more important than learning to swim, so give it a rest at the first signs of uneasiness. When your toddler is comfortable invite her to jump in from the side, to be caught by you. If she enjoys going underwater, so much the better. Artificial supports can be good for awhile, but often create undue dependency. It's better to use only a kickboard for support. Let your toddler grasp it to keep afloat, while kicking her legs. When she is ready throw her bodily towards the edge of the pool so she has to swim the remaining distance. Always tell the toddler what you're going to do with her before you do it. Short swimming lessons every day are better than a long lesson once a week.

A few cautions – the child must be taught never to swim without a parent or a trusted adult. Second, there is a risk of ear infections. Dry your child's ears slowly and carefully, and at the first sign of ear problems give the swimming lessons a rest.

Why teach swimming? Safety is one obvious reason. It is also an excellent and enjoyable movement activity. The benefits to brain development, self-esteem and overall quality of life are tremendous. It is also the kind of activity that the whole family can do together. Later, when you go on family trips, you will find yourself making reservations only in hotels that have pools. Unlike many others, this is a sport that can be actively enjoyed for a lifetime.

Messing Around

It is fun to watch how your toddler can use his hand, with a precise pincer grip and the ability to release things at will. By this time the obsession with dropping things from the high-chair has passed. Now any task involving hand-eye coordination or eye-foot coordination will be pursued with intense interest if presented in a do-able way. Drawing is possible, cutting papers with a child-size scissors, washing anything and everything, climbing obstacles, rolling and kicking a ball.

Small accidents will happen – keep a box of band-aids handy. Your toddler will get dirty – it's a part of childhood. I still laugh when I remember my little neighbor, Jennifer, all dressed up for a party in her frilly clothes, toddling out to her backyard and

straight to the muddiest corner to play with the gooey stuff. By the time her mother saw the situation it was too late. Jennifer had become a mudball! Fortunately her mother had plenty of wit and a sense of humor. She put a big apron over her own party clothes and wrapped Jennifer in the apron to bring her inside where everyone laughed and fussed over her, gingerly removed the muddy clothes and brought her for a nice shower.

Be aware that showers and washing machines must have been invented with toddlers in mind. Simple light clothing helps. But give your toddler the freedom to move that her development demands.

Language

At fifteen months your toddler is busy putting words together, and trying to make two word sentences "Me sit". "Doggie here." "Bottle gone." You can look for a real spurt in vocabulary growth starting around eighteen months. Toddlers have far better comprehension of our speech than would appear from what comes out of their mouths. Between twenty-four and thirty months most children explode into full blown speech, with all kinds of variations along the way. There is a wide range of normality in how children's language develops. Some children just need more time before it all comes tumbling out – word order, grammar, syntax and all. English has lots of regional accents and these can cause some problems for toddlers.

I remember like today sitting in a restaurant in Biloxi, Mississippi, after having a good lunch. My two children were there, the youngest daughter just two years old. When the waitress asked us, in her best accent "Would y'all like some pa?" my youngest daughter reacted with something like shock. "It's not pa" she chided "it's pie". Her attempt to defend her hard-won language has gone down in the family folklore.

English is also full of irregular verbs, and when your toddler says "I finded the ball" you need not worry. It just shows she has learnt the common past tense ending. Just give back the correct version of the word, without laboring the point – "Oh, so you found the ball". The child does the hard work of learning the lan-

guage – all we have to do is provide the raw material, talk, read and sing, as correctly as we know how. Riddles, simple poems and verbal games have a special attraction for young children and they will ask you often to repeat things like:

"I scream
you scream,
We all scream
for ice-cream."

Music

Knowing that the logic and math center in the brain is located next to the center for music, many neuroscientists believe that musical training will bring in its train at least the possibility of greater capacity for math and reasoning.

Suzuki Music

Shinichi Suzuki of Japan has produced astonishing results in training very young children in musical skills. First they are taught to listen to rhythmic folk songs, then to make simple musical sounds, and finally to learn a full classical repertoire, using violin, piano or flute. In the Suzuki Method – the "mother-tongue method" – the child learns music as a second language with his parents. Guided by a music teacher, parent and child quickly learn to perform accurately and achieve musical literacy. As a Suzuki parent, I experienced the thrill of seeing my child "explode" into making music and performing with others at quite an advanced level. I know several children with this training who continued on to become professional musicians. The majority reap only the benefits that musical training gives – the boost to overall development and a lifelong love of music and sense of competence. Suzuki states as one of his main objectives "the development of character." Seeing these serious young people, from toddlers to teenagers, devoting themselves to artistic endeavor, one can grant him a large measure of success.

Musical Education

Music has many forms, from rock to classical, but toddlers and young children all relate well to the folk-songs, lullabies, and sea shanties etc., that make up part of our cultural heritage. Certain songs can catapult us adults right back into the atmosphere of our childhood. These are the songs we need to share with our toddlers. Singing along in the car, at bathtime and bed time creates the magical childhood experiences that make each family unique and special. As I often tell parents, you do not have to be a good singer. This may be the only time in your life your singing is appreciated! Nothing, not even tapes of the best professional singers, can substitute for the immediacy of your own imperfect voice. Rhythm is the easiest part of music to master, so tapping out rhythms, dancing and marching are good ways to begin. Every family that continues to keep alive its musical heritage is sometimes happy and surprised to hear two year old composers making up their own spontaneous songs as they take a bath or prepare to sleep.

When I lived in West Africa I discovered that the children were taught by their parents, and by the whole village, to sing and dance almost from birth. Their folk music was very melodic and rhythmically complex. Every child enjoyed singing and dancing especially on moonlit evenings when the whole village got together, drummers to provide the rhythm, women and children to provide the singing. In our culture they would be considered very advanced musically. Put it another way, our Western culture does not develop children's capacity for music as much as it could or should. If we want to develop the musical talents of our children – what Howard Gardner calls the Musical Intelligence - we have to work at it. Start off by singing to your infant and with your toddler. We have that heritage to pass on.

Independence, Self-control

He was a big strong boy for a two year old. His face was red with rage and his voice rose in a scream. Like others in the shopping center, I felt shocked by the fury in the little body, and the answering fury in his mother as she tried in vain to get him to sit

still in the shopping cart. "No, no, no, no. I won't" he yelled. But she would not back down, in spite of the onlookers. "Oh yes, you will!" As I passed on to the next aisle I could hear a sound, like a slap, and a child's scream that sounded like "I hate you," then all was quiet. The reality is that slapping, though it works in the short term, is not the way to develop self control and tends to be abusive.

Your toddler wants independence with every fiber of her being. She asserts it by shouting 'no' to the most reasonable requests. "I want to do it my way" becomes her theme song. When we refuse her demands she throws a tantrum and screams "I hate you", at us, the most loving parents in the world! What to do?

Believe it or not, this age represents the best opportunity for the child to achieve self-control. She should emerge from this period at 30 to 36 months, able to control her aggressive impulses and to follow most of the rules of human behavior. What is the magic? It is our own self-control!

What any toddler most needs is a foresighted, self-controlled parent, who can see ahead of time where he is going and what situations he will meet, and can discuss with him what are the ground rules that apply in any situation. Ground rules give emotional security, by providing behavioral frames - the limits within which freedom can be exercised.

Take, for instance, the shopping center. On the way there I tell him "At the shopping center, little children can choose whether to push the cart with me, or to sit in it. What would you like to do?"

This takes care of the hands and gives a choice. There are no bribes, no threats, above all of physical punishment, and we both know what is expected. Perhaps a child who has been there a lot may propose a third option "Let me walk by myself." We can accept it with a condition – "Fine, as long as you keep your hands behind your back, or give me your hand." In shopping centers the hands seem to have a will of their own, even in the case of adults . Knowing this we foresee most of the situations that might arise.

I need to remain constantly aware, observant, so that I understand my child's behavior and can anticipate what may happen.

Modeling Behavior

In the home I constantly show how to behave in any situation. "Watch how I close the door . . . See, no sound, Let's see if you can do it." "See how the cat likes to be stroked, so gently that she purrs. Can you do that?" "Look how I put back your sister's toys where they belong. Would you like to help me?" "Do you see Daddy doing his income tax papers? Let's not disturb him."

Lessons like these are followed up by reminders:

"Remember how we close the door? Do you want me to show you again?"

"I don't think pussy likes his tail being pulled; let me show you" etc.

The language we use is gentle, not peremptory. But there is no doubt in the toddler's mind that these are rules that everyone obeys. This is what it means to be authoritative, rather than authoritarian or negative! We want to be positive, not like the harried mother saying "Find out what Johnny's doing, and tell him not to!!"

And if your toddler still screams occasionally "I hate you", the perfect response, that always works, is to smile and say "But I love you."

Another ground rule is that certain closets or drawers are sacred – never to be touched. Dad and Mom both need a place to keep computers, personal papers, even magazines that are not to be cut up with child-size scissors. Show the child what is there and say: "This is mine and nobody is to touch it. Do I need to put a big mark on it so you can remember? Here, you mark it for me with an X." Parents have rights too!

In general, video equipment, TVs and computers should be off limits to toddlers. Items like remote controls should simply be kept well out of reach. The toddler needs movement and language for his development, and electronic media are the death of mobility and true conversation.

Apprenticeship

During the middle ages, (and even now in simpler societies), apprenticeship was the great learning tool for passing on knowl-

edge of specialized crafts. A master craftsman would allow his apprentices to share his table and find a place to sleep in his attic or basement. When the young person had learnt how to be helpful and knew how to behave among other people he would slowly be introduced to the elements of the trade or craft. After years of working with the master, the apprentice would be considered fit to present his master-work, or masterpiece, thus showing that he had mastered his craft. Then he would become a journeyman carpenter or cask-maker or glassblower, and eventually might become good enough to have apprentices of his own and be recognized as a master.

Our situation as parents bears some similarities. We have graduated from being apprentices of our own parents and we hope that we are ready to take on apprentices – children - of our own. With us they learn what it is to be human, how to make friends and deal with all sorts of people, how to work and how to play, how to be good citizens and contributing members of the great organizations of our own culture – schools, churches, political parties, business firms – how to be dependable and loving men or women.

Toilet Training

Another step on the way to independence is learning to go to the bathroom by oneself. Muscular maturation can come anytime between two years and three. Usually girls are a few months ahead of the boys. As soon as the child is aware of wetness or discomfort because of diapers he is ready to train himself. We invite the child to change his diapers standing up and let him be as independent as possible. He will need coaching on how to fasten it. The exercise of independence increases awareness. It requires patient coaching on our part. When we begin to use training pants we need to be constantly vigilant and give frequent reminders, like "Now is a good time to go. Just sit on the toilet seat. I can read you a story."

Emulation of other children who "go by themselves" is another spur that helps occasionally. When they finally make it, we have to be ready for occasional lapses and accidents, even prolonged bedwetting at times. It's better to make little of these backslidings, and give our child a diaper at bedtime, if there is a problem. We

need also to check if bedwetting is related to nutrition, an allergy, or even emotional stress factors.

Nutrition

It is also the time to lay down good habits of nutrition. This requires forethought and planning.

We do know that sugary foods and food additives are bad for all children, even toxic for some.

So here are my guidelines for good nutrition and happy mealtimes:

1) Natural foods and drinks are best, the more natural the better. Without becoming a faddist learn all you can about healthy nutrition. It is important that we do not become one of the "nuts among the berries."
2) Cookies, candies and soft drinks should be reserved for special days, not found in your refrigerator or on the kitchen counter.
3) Snacks of fruits and vegetables, cut up and available as finger foods, should be kept ready and prepared fresh each day.
4) Cold water, milk and natural fruit juices should be available on demand.
5) A good norm for meals is three meals a day, to be eaten at the family table with lots of conversation and fun, even a few jokes.
6) To avoid difficulty, serve food family style, allowing the toddler to serve himself. His interest in the activity of serving eliminates the fussiness. Make him aware that what we serve ourselves is to be eaten, without making this a rule. If you are serving, it is a good idea to serve a little less than you think he should have. He can always ask for more.
7) Correct use of napkins, table mats or table cloths creates an atmosphere of respect.
8) Bribes of foods or sweets for good behavior are a no-no.

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9) If there is a TV near the eating area, it should be turned off during meals. Television produces passive toddlers. Snacking while watching TV produces couch potatoes.

Sense of Order

This is a good time, as your baby becomes a toddler, to review your child's room for general orderliness. Before going to bed you should help your toddler put everything back where it belongs - pants and shirts in the right drawers, a "garage area" for trucks and wheeled toys, a shelf for dolls and stuffed animals. This is the stage in development when putting things away is an enjoyable activity. Many stores offer modular furniture for children, enabling us to let the room grow with the child, or children. Sharing a room is a really good idea for most siblings up to age 6 or 7. The important thing, developmentally speaking, is to provide well planned storage space for clothes, toys and special interests. A child of 30 months has reached nearly half of his adult height, so a child size bed is in order, that she can keep until age 10 or 11 at least. If your toddler enjoys music, an inexpensive tape or CD player is a good birthday present, together with a selection of tapes she likes to hear or sing along with. Think too about storage of tapes and helping to store them in the proper containers each evening.

Going to Pre-School: Separation – Anxiety

It is the first day of pre-school. All the beginners are arriving with their mothers, and a few fathers. Most of the children are calm, some even have tentative smiles on their faces. But one little girl is inconsolable. She clings to her mother's knees, until the mother picks her up and carries her, still protesting, to the door. When she puts her down I notice that there are tears streaming down the mother's face, as well as the child's.

Your toddler is growing up and has accomplished an enormous amount of work already. She can walk, she can communicate pretty well; she cannot reason yet but her intuitions are good. She thinks before she acts. She is secure in knowing that she is loved by her parents upon whom she still depends for physical and emotional support.

For the parent there may be some personal turmoil, getting back into the work force, part or full-time, leaving this child, who has become a part of you, in the care of somebody else. Feelings of guilt and self doubt are hard to avoid. The beginning pre-schooler knows us better than we know ourselves, it would seem. Being in tune with our feelings she feels the same anxiety at the separation that we do, and is not yet in control of her feelings.

We need to reassure ourselves that pre-school is just what she needs, to meet new friends, learn new songs and learn all the things that Mom and Dad cannot teach. We have visited any number of pre-schools, we have revisited the one we finally chose, so it is time for us adults to be very strong and to give firm emotional support. Crying is for later, in the parking lot.

Our child's entry into pre-school marks a new stage on the way to full independence, and we really need to congratulate ourselves as well as our child.

Still, for many of us, it is the end of a part of childhood that had a special beauty, so it is natural for us to feel a pang, not just of anxiety but of sadness.

Choosing a Pre-School

A developmental pre-school should have the following characteristics:

1) Activities should be child-centered, not adult-centered; children should have a range of interesting activities to choose from, and be allowed to choose the activities they like. The teacher should be trained to observe, and to assist only those children who need help. Unnecessary help only hinders development.
2) Structured and unstructured activities should be balanced to reflect the young child's informal and random approach to self-development.
3) Activities in the environment should reflect the child's sensitive periods or windows of opportunity. See pp. 7-9.
4) Mixed age groups are best after the toddler stage. Younger children get models, older children get a chance to teach and to lead.

5) Group activities should occupy short periods of time and should be well structured by the adults.
6) There should be frequent opportunities for art, music, dance and gross motor development.
7) Parents should be clearly recognized and respected as the first educators of their child. There should be opportunities for parent observation, and involvement such as meetings, committees, room parents, conferences and parent volunteers.

It takes any child a couple of months to completely settle in to a new situation. Check out the pre-school before your child goes there, don't expect too much the first couple of weeks, and be prepared to stay with the same school for at least the academic year. Usually your child will enjoy the experience and feel happy to go every day, especially when he has made a friend or two. This is an area we can help along by car pooling with potential friends or inviting the friends to spend an hour or two at home after school. A half day situation, five days a week, is the best and easiest introduction for the toddler or young child. Once the routine is established, there are no further questions like, "Is this a school day or not?".

Summary of Development From Pregnancy Through 30 Months

From soon after conception there is massive brain growth. To protect this development the mother needs to abstain from alcohol and drugs, including tobacco. Both parents need to prepare themselves and their house as the environment to help the newborn's development. After birth, the newborn's continuing massive brain development will depend on his interaction with parents and the physical environment.

Parents need to give time to bonding with the newborn, and stimulate her by carrying her with them, talking with her, and encouraging movement. A calm, orderly and harmonious environment safe for the baby to creep, to crawl and eventually to walk, is required.

Building up an extended family to help in childcare, organizing the baby's room as she grows, and recording development are

important tasks for this time.

Movement explodes into walking, the toddler soon learns to control running; the hand is able to grasp and release with precision; brain development is rapid, conditional on the child's movement and language awareness increasing. Give as much freedom of movement as possible. Bring the toddler for long walks, and play games. Try teaching her to swim.

Language and Music

The toddler explodes into language and music. Teach word games, sing along with the toddler. Read to her.

Independence – What to Do

The toddler wants to do everything for herself. Support your child's efforts to gain independence. This is the ideal time to teach self-control by demonstrating it and help the child to achieve it, using simple ground-rules.

Nutrition

Have only simple natural foods. Don't use food as a bribe.

Order

The child's room should help to give a sense of order and consistency.

Pre-School

Help your child to feel secure as he makes the transition to pre-school. Choose the school carefully. Being present with the toddler is the best security we can give.

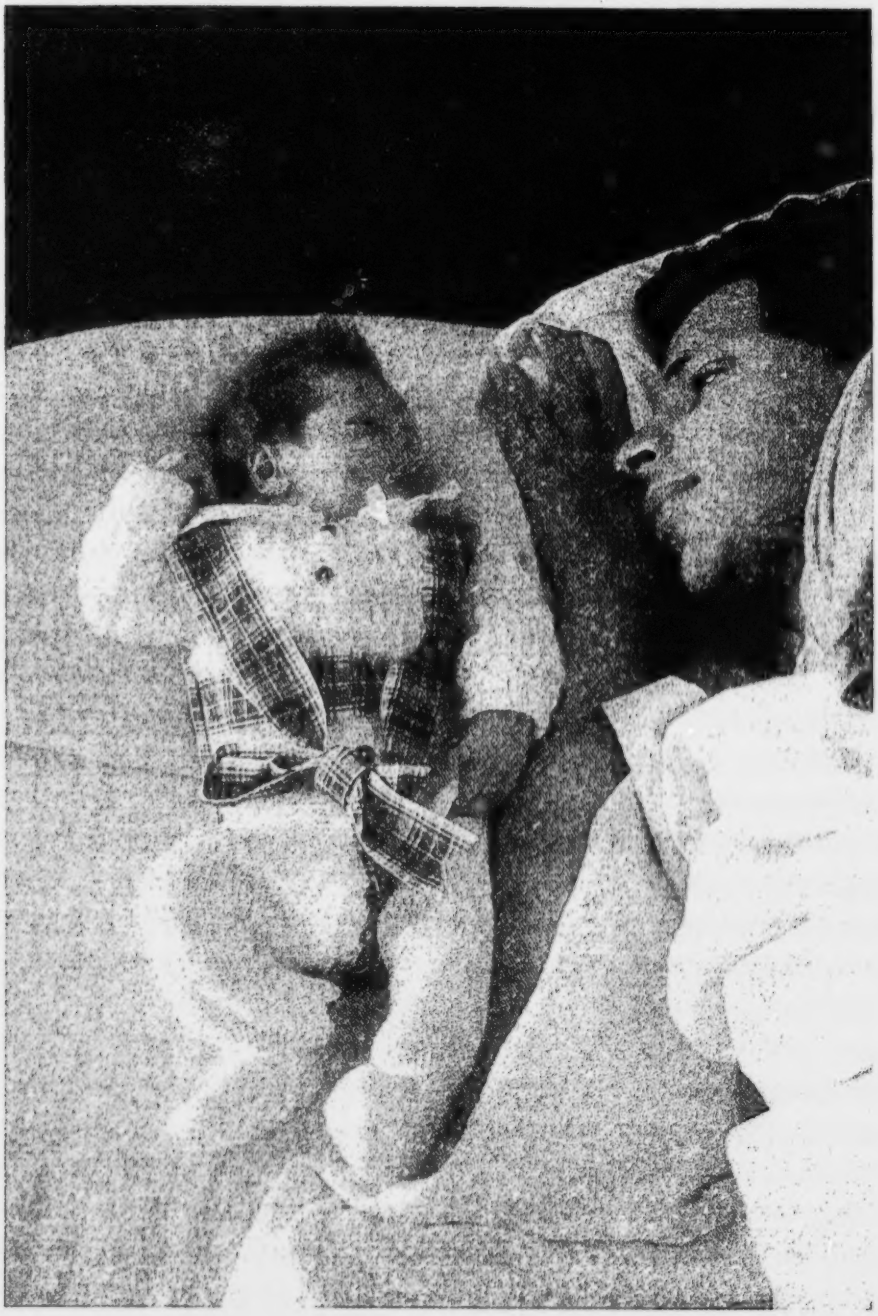

Photo by Laura Guimarães

Getting to know you. Bonding takes lots of time.

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Photo by Maurice Kernan

Exploring the sea-shore – what could be more fun?
This is a starfish?

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Photo by Maurice Kernan

Photo by Ricardo St. Clair

Discovering fresh tastes – an apple and a mulberry.

Photo by Ricardo St. Clair

Photo by Ricardo St. Clair

A stimulating enrvironment elicits concentration.

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II

Pre Schoolers – Cruising on the Magic Carpet

In this part the overall themes are ch. 1) emotional and social development, ch. 2) the child's own self-construction, and ch. 3) cognitive development. Please note that these themes run throughout the pre-school years.

Chapter 1 *The Lover – 30 Months to 48 Months*

Entry into pre-school marks a new stage in development - a recognition of our child's ability to be by himself and to get along in the big world outside of home. As he starts into this new life friends become important to him. Inviting a friend to spend an hour or two, going over to a friend's house is a part of making friends. Shy children need additional help; very often just putting your child in friendly contact with others is enough. When children come over to your house, make sure there is a choice of good activities that they can share. Monitor these visits closely and make sure that ordinary politeness is being observed – enough toys to go round, enough snacks and juices in the refrigerator. Afterwards, give your comments on how the visit went – "I saw Brian sharing his action figures with you. He seems to be a nice friend" or "when you were tussling with Jessica, was that just play or was it more like fighting?" Or "If Mike grabbed my things like he grabbed your truck, I would tell him 'No'", or "If the only thing you do in Mary's house while her mother is out, is watch TV, let's find another friend?"

Becoming friendly with the parents of our children's friends is another by-product of having children at school or pre-school.

Emotional Support

The child's need for our love and esteem is not lessened as he goes to pre-school. He still needs to be assured of our love every

day, by hugs and kisses as well as by words. By now, he can respond to our challenges, and will appreciate the sense of independence they imply: "Let's see if you are able to put on your socks / shirt / underwear by yourself." "I like helping you to button your shirt or zip your jacket, but let's see how much of it you can do for yourself." We offer to help if needed, and we never challenge him to do what is beyond his powers. Rather than "Tie your own shoes", we say "You start to cross over your shoelaces, and I'll help you to finish tying." The child still feels incapable in so many areas, so self-esteem is a delicate flower. When the child feels secure in our love for him and our support for his efforts at independence he can blossom. If he challenges you to a race, let him win most of the time. If we or his siblings make fun of his mistakes and failures it is a crushing blow to his sense of himself.

Fears

When my children were three and four years old I recall inviting some neighbors over with their three children, who were a few years older than mine. While we adults watched the game, they played in the pool and seemed to have a great time.

I was enraged to discover, a few days later, that the older children had persuaded my two that "Jaws" lived in the bottom of the pool, and that the nearby woods were full of wild animals, with big fangs, waiting to grab any unwary child who ventured near. I could not get my children to step out of the house. It took days of persuasion to convince them that the woods and the pool were safe!

At age three and four many children have a hard time dealing with fears. It does not matter if the thing they fear is real or imagined. For them, tigers, robbers, monsters and death can be equally terrifying. A figure as benign as Santa Claus can be a scary monster. Halloween is great for older children. For the little ones it is a really scary time. It is necessary to help little children talk about their fears and look for ways of dealing with them. Just sharing their feelings and taking them seriously is the greatest help we can give.

As children get a little older, at around four, their fears center

more on real things, like violence and death. Then it is good to share your philosophy of life and death, and your religious outlook, with the child.

"Grandma had lived a good long life. Now God has taken her back to be happy with Him and the angels." "The dog died because it was the end of his life. It was time for him to die."

An intelligent child may well ask "What happens to me if you die?" The answer does not lie in talking about life insurance! Before embarking on conversations about life and death it is good to think through your own philosophy as a mature adult.

Stress

Nowadays, it is a cliché, but nonetheless true, to say that stress is a part of our everyday lives. When we are unduly stressed by our work schedules, by lack of resources, by feelings of inadequacy to the demands placed on us, our children suffer and become stressed in their turn. A certain amount of stress can be growthful, even beneficial. Learning to respond to hardship and stress has helped to equip many men and women for lifetimes of achievement.

But when stress is overwhelming it can have physical and psychological effects that are harmful, such as the heart-rate and blood pressure going up. When children are unduly stressed the learning centers of the brain shut down. Stress takes over the whole system.

How can we reduce stress to manageable levels, for ourselves and for our children? First, review our job situation, our workload and our daily schedules. Sometimes a cutback is needed, sometimes a change of career. Postponing the new car, the new house for a year or two can sometimes be all it takes. Enjoying each day as it comes, spending more time with our young child instead of overtime at work, a general improvement in our attitude – we must be ready for these adjustments. Most older adults wish they had spent a little more time with their children. We can learn from their experience.

In some cases the only stress-reducer we need is to get up a half-hour earlier each morning, to allow ample time for everyone to have a calm breakfast and get off to work or to school without a

frantic rush. Planning ahead, choosing and laying out clothes and setting the table the night before, can also help. As with most things, the answer lies in our hands. Young children need consistent routines and respond poorly to change. Establishing a workable routine and sticking to it may be part of the answer.

Vacations With Children

Much as we love our children there are times when we would give our eye-teeth for a short vacation away from them.

All I would say is, think long and hard, if your child is still of pre-school age. Some children will see the disappearance of Mom and Dad as desertion – the fulfillment of their worst fears. The damage to their feelings of security and being loved is very hard to repair. A few children in these circumstances become physically sick. Reasoning with children does not help. They live in the here and now, they perceive only a gaping absence and they are too young to reason for themselves.

If there are grandparents or an extended family member, who have a close relationship, almost parental, with your child, a prolonged absence of a week or more becomes possible.

Think rather of bringing your child along with you. It may mean a different kind of vacation – a camper rather than hotels, Disneyland instead of Las Vegas, or perhaps just exploring the resources of the community close to home – parks, zoos, libraries, pools, etc.

Planning vacations with children in mind helps a great deal – providing paper and crayons for long trips, a stuffed animal for nap time, board games, playing cards and hand-held electronic games for slightly older children. As much as possible keep to routines and ground-rules that work at home – they give the child enough security to deal with changes of scene. Travelling along highways or in trains try counting games – count silos, cornfields, vultures, hawks, Volkswagens, or Cadillacs, motor-cycles, etc., etc. Our spirit of flexibility, security and readiness for adventure will communicate itself to our children.

On the subject of being with our children as much as possible, I like the quote from Maria Montessori: "If we were to establish a

first principle, it would be to constantly allow the child's participation in our lives. For he cannot learn to act if he does not join in our actions . . . To extend to the child this hospitality, to allow him to participate in our work can be difficult, but costs nothing. Our time is far more precious than material objects."

A Note to Grandparents

What of grandparents who are taking care of very young grandchildren for more than one day? First, realize that even though they love you, your grandchildren really need the close relationship with their parents. A nightly phone call to Mom and Dad is a great idea. Making a drawing to describe each day's happenings and mailing or faxing it to Mom and Dad can allow the child to feel how easily reached the parents are. We need to encourage the children's love for their parents. It is good to check out, in the child's home if possible, what are the daily routines and ground rules, and how to obtain compliance with them. It is better to be a little strict at first and gradually relax, rather than be unstructured at first and feel obliged to lay down the law later. Many grandparents feel that the parents, mother, father or both, are doing an inadequate job of parenting in one or another respect. How to deal with this feeling?

First, concentrate on the positive. What are they doing well or very well? Second, be aware that a new family, very different from yours, has been established. Be prepared to accept differences in this family as you would accept your next door neighbor's family being different. Third, remember that it's not your responsibility to teach them how to parent. That time is past. When you feel anxious, the best advice I can give you is to sit and sing or pray, instead of calling with unwanted advice. Being a grandparent is a gift that should brighten our later years, and requires a light touch. Aside from some tragic situations the child remains the responsibility of the parents.

Self discipline

Your child is developing normally and you are trying to understand the factors that help along the development, providing an

environment that is humanly caring and supportive of her efforts, giving enough stimulation for motor and language development. What of the child's growth in self-discipline? What do we have to do?

The basic ground-rules are already established; now they need to be elaborated and reinforced by demonstration. For instance, your young person makes a watery mess in the bathroom – "Let me show you how we pull the shower curtain closed" – we demonstrate gently – "Now, you try it." Some times we are wiser to let the episode – the water-sloshing – pass, and wait until a more suitable time for the demonstration. Child and adult both need to be calm and relaxed.

Or, your child calls upstairs in a very loud voice. At a suitable time we give the lesson "When indoors, this is how we speak." "Let me hear you say that again, more softly."

Mealtimes can be contentious, or they can be very pleasant if we take care:

"When we're eating we wait for everyone to be served before we start to eat."

"When you put food on your plate you are expected to try it."

"Tables are for eating on, chairs are for sitting. Show me how well you can sit at the table."

"When I need something, I say 'Please'. When I get it, I say 'Thank you'". We can avoid problems at bedtime by resorting to the "clock routine." "The clock says it is time to go . . . I know you do not want to, but the clock says . . . ".

It is vital that we observe these rules as they apply to ourselves as well. Otherwise we are poor models. What we do matters more than what we say! Do you notice that all these rules or reminders are given in a positive, respectful fashion? We presume that our child wants to know how to behave in the situation and we simply give the information. Sometimes we will need to resort to "Let me show you how . . ." or "Do I need to help you do thus and so?" Temperaments differ, but every child worth her salt will try the limits now and then. When the limits are clear and we nip any misbehavior in the bud, our child feels more secure that she is cared for, and not left at the mercy of her impulses. Our own self-control is crucial in establishing our child's self-discipline.

The Child's Environment

We continue to provide a physical environment that is orderly, aesthetic, with good music at times, and good smells around mealtime. Three year olds need to feel that in every room of the house there is some provision for their needs. Bathrooms may need a moveable step to provide access to toilet and washbasin. Substituting a bolt for a lock on the bathroom doors is a must. Another kind of bathroom mishap is easily avoided by giving the child clothing that is easily removed. Many otherwise beautiful items of children's clothing simply fail the test of ease of removal and putting on.

We can make steep stairways safer by installing a handrail at the child's height. Three year olds are climbers and experimenters, so remove all medications from cabinets and counters that they might possibly reach.

Living rooms, family rooms and kitchens should each have areas where the child can play, draw, do puzzles, do useful tasks like sweeping, washing and cutting fruit and vegetables. A small table in the kitchen for food preparation, another in the tiled area of the family room for art work – even messy art work like finger-painting, a manual carpet sweeper in the living room and a place to keep dolls and puzzles – these are all things to plan and to think about. When the child "owns" the house, she can begin to feel responsible for keeping it orderly and beautiful. If we are grudging about giving the child space for her activities, it remains somebody else's house, the child feels little sense of responsibility.

A three year old can learn to fold clothes as they come from the drying machine. She should be helped each week to put socks, underwear, shirts and pants in the right drawer in her room and to keep the basic order of the room. Selecting and laying out clothes for the next day should now be a part of the going to bed routine.

Three year olds need limits, and some things in the house should be limited to older people – Mom's computer and drawer, Dad's desk and private papers, the stove area of the kitchen, the remote control of the TV or radio, kitchen cleaners, matches, any kind of machine, especially the car, are things that come to mind. Most accidents happen because of our failure to think ahead. A

weekly safety-check of the house and yard is not too much trouble.

Sex Education

Curiosity about sex and sexuality is common at this age. Boys are curious about girls, girls are curious about boys. There is a well-known cartoon of a naked little girl, looking at her mother in the bathtub, saying "Mom, how come I'm so plain, and you're so fancy?" Little boys often ask their mothers or sisters "Why don't you have a penis?" This kind of curiosity is natural and should be satisfied, without going into details that the child does not need or ask for. It is better to give the anatomical names for penis and vagina rather than cutesy words like 'wee-wee'. Usually, when the newly talking child can name things he is satisfied with that level of awareness.

The need for detailed sexual instruction normally arises before and around the time of puberty. The most beneficial sexual orientation for children of this age – three to four – is to be aware of a loving, considerate relationship between the man and the woman who are most important in their lives. The idea that men and women respect and show consideration for each other is far more important than any lessons about the birds and the bees. The idea that our bodies are good and nothing to be ashamed of is something that we teach with our attitude to life and to love; our twin guidelines should be love and respect.

In my experience young children are not negatively affected by nudity, their own or others. When it is matter-of-fact and dealt with respectfully, it can have a positive effect on their own self-image.

Pastimes in the Home

The three years old needs a minimum of electronic entertainment, which tends to make him passive and lethargic. He can and should be challenged in the outdoors – long walks with plenty of time for exploring and poking around, climbing and games in the park, gardening with Mom and Dad and playing with friends. A sandbox behind some bushes, giving a sense of being hidden, a tablecloth over a small table in the family room – these are things

to delight the hearts of young children, and mean that your children can be with you but slightly removed, still within calling distance.

The parent's role as master of apprentices continues during the whole of preschool. If I model my best behavior and act in a way that is polite, generous, truthful and caring I can expect that slowly my child will follow my example. An unbreakable routine should be cuddling up with your child at the end of each day with a book chosen by him, to read and talk about the pictures, and from that to talk about anything and everything that seems important at the time. Moms and Dads have different things to contribute, so this should be a shared task – sometimes Mom alone, sometimes Dad alone, sometimes both together. Together we are weaving myths and memories for our child's lifetime, even for our grandchildren's. Just settle down, turn off the game shows and enjoy it!

Chapter 2 *The Worker: The Four year old*

In one of her books, Montessori describes a little girl sitting with a glum face in front of a plate of delicious food. Somebody had promised her that she could set the table, then had forgotten, and given the task to somebody else. Distress and anger had taken away the child's appetite, so she sat there in mute protest.

It's so easy to forget that children are real people with feelings that can be hurt, like anyone else's. Emotions drive the child's activities, just as they do ours. A depressed adult or a distressed child cannot act as they normally should.

When we engage the child in our daily tasks like setting the table, folding the laundry, feeding the dog or cat, we are living up to our role as apprentice-masters. At first we have to show every detail of the task and stay throughout to see that it is well done. Later we can challenge the child's sense of competence and say "Let's see how well you can feed and water the dog. Fido will be happy." Unfortunately, long term memory is as yet undeveloped, so we cannot just say – "Your job is to feed the dog every day."

Fido would not be happy, and might even starve!

Repetition

Piaget and Montessori were wonderfully perceptive observers of children. Both remarked on how children love to repeat any task that engages their interest. Montessori tells of noticing a three year old busy at putting cylinders into holes in a wooden block. When the cylinders had all been placed the child took them out and started all over again. As an experiment, Montessori moved the child and her task to the top of a table. She simply continued to repeat it over and over without a pause. Only after many repetitions did the child look around, show awareness of others and smile with satisfaction. Piaget explains this as the child's constructing her own understanding of the world and how it works. Repetition is the young child's tool for this construction. We need not fear boredom on the part of the child – she remains intensely concentrated on the repeated activity or song, or game. When she's done it enough, she will stop.

Purpose

Montessori emphasizes that each child is driven by a serious purpose – "the construction of the person he is to become." Whether he plays a game, experiments with an object he finds, listens to our words, or pursues a project he finds interesting, the underlying purpose is there. The fact that children universally pursue their aims in a random unsystematic way makes it harder for adults to understand or relate to the child's activity. But give him a project that captures his interest and he will toil away at it for quite long periods and come back to it again and again, until he feels sure that he has mastered it. He is not interested in working for reward, nor is he very concerned with the results. He enjoys the process, not the product. Our love and support are the only rewards he needs.

Respecting Activity Cycles

When your child is busily engaged, (is it work? or play? who cares?) we need to respect his activity cycle and avoid unnecessary

interruptions. Instead of a peremptory order to "Stop now, and come for lunch", try something like "It's nearly time for lunch. Would you prefer hamburgers or hot-dogs?" or "When it's time to help me prepare lunch, I'll call you."

The way we talk to our child can express respect for his interests and a certain flexibility about time.

Naming

The windows of opportunity for development through movement and language and sense of order are still open, throughout the preschool years, though becoming smaller.

During this time the child is refining her speech, improving her vocabulary and using language, naming things, as a tool for building awareness. Just naming something gives the child a new awareness, a way of understanding the differences between things. "Our car is a Ford. Can you show me another car that looks the same? See the little oval sign that shows it's a Ford."

"Now, here is Brian's car. It's a Honda. Do you see how it is different from ours?"

Or on a walk outdoors – "That bird is a robin. See his red front. This one here is a crow. See, he's all black, and makes that crow noise – caw, caw."

Naming different animals, different colors, all the furniture items in the house, rather than calling them by "that thing over there" helps our child to develop vocabulary control and fluency in expressing herself. Sometimes you will get a refreshing surprise. Whenever I drove my children to preschool – a low one-story building, we passed the high school, which was a five story building. They often commented "Here comes the high school. Next comes the low school, where we go." Smaller children, low school – it makes sense.

Learning To Read

When a child has mastered speech it is a comparatively easy step for him to go on and master writing and reading, using a simple phonetic approach. When you are reading with your child (every day, remember?) pause sometimes and point out an initial

letter e.g. c, "c is for c-c-cat." Then show other initial consonant sounds e.g. "m is for m-m-man". "Say it – m-m-man." Another day, ask him to help you read the same book, and check if he still remembers c and m. If so add a few more initial consonants. Another time, show the short vowel sounds, like in c-a-a-a-a-t or in m-a-a-an. Check on the subsequent days if he remembers the earlier lessons. Finally, show him the final consonants of cat and man, and any other short phonetic words that occur in the same book. After some time your child should be able to put the sounds together with the letters, and eventually read many of the words in the book. These are a few ideas to help you understand the process of reading. When he is able to read a few words phonetically you can write them down for him and help him discover the messages. Words like 'the', which are not phonetic are best taught as whole words. So your first written message to your child might be "See Sam the cat. Sam is a fat cat." Draw a fat cat on the paper, title it 'Sam'; then help him to write you a message about "The man in the van." If your child is ready and if you do not force the pace, he will pursue the game with interest. If your child is not eager for the lessons, be patient and let it rest awhile. Typically, one of your children will want to pursue early reading and another child, with much the same kind of experience, and intelligence, will prefer to draw and color. It is good to invite your child to learn with you, but the choice is his whether or not to pursue reading. It is much more important that your child enjoys sharing reading and all the interesting things you have to offer. An environment rich in language of all kinds, word games, songs, interesting conversation as well as books and periodicals, is the best foundation for your child's learning to read and write.

Need For Physical Activity

Many pediatricians, realizing that their little patients need to move about and to play, have set up their waiting rooms with areas where toddlers and older children can manipulate puzzles and interesting toys. I know one office where somebody brought in six ancient typewriters and some really good picture books. Children beg to go there early, so they will have time to play with

the doctor's toys! For parents such a child-friendly waiting room is a real blessing, because it takes into account their child's needs. If you have to bring your child to a place where he has to sit and be still, bring along a child-bag with a few toys or games that he can enjoy.

What We Can Do

We have been taking long walks with our toddler, and playing in the park with our three year old. Now that she is four we can introduce ball games like soccer and baseball, rope-climbing for upper body strength; even activities like skiing, skating and ballet now become possible. If swimming was not yet introduced, this is a good time to start. Gym and swim classes for this age, especially those involving the parents, are a wonderful way to help develop the child and have a good time doing it. Just remember your child's random approach to everything. It is not yet the time for competitive activities, or for lengthy lessons. Whatever activity your child enjoys most is the one to pursue. Playing games can contribute to a positive self-image, and the development in all areas gets a powerful boost. In addition, at this age the child overcomes many perceptual deficits through her own motor activity, and integrates herself physically and emotionally – "gets it all together", as we say.

Activities

As your child gets older the electronic media become more attractive. It is for you to decide how much time she should spend at videos, computers and TV.

If her environment has many other attractive options involving physical challenges and active games, you need not worry too much about your child becoming a couch potato. You do need to be concerned about the content of what she watches. Giving your child criteria for intelligent media appreciation can begin now. Help her to choose good programs, rather than watch TV in general, with it's emphasis on violence and commercial values.

The underlying fact is that at this age, if your child is to develop properly she needs movement, not TV. Encourage her to wash

dishes and clothes, sweep floors and polish everything in sight. "Encourage" means "do with." She should have paper and crayons or paint for drawing, a suitable small scissors for cutting and glue for pasting. The life of a four year old should be busy with games with other children, going for a swim, making music, climbing trees, throwing stones in a pond, occasionally getting muddy and dirty. She is not yet ready for "toughening up". Right now she needs protection from the hard knocks of life, so that she can pursue her own self-construction without undue fears or safety risks. This is just as true for boys as for girls – no competition yet awhile!

Around this age skipping is an interesting accomplishment. When a child can skip, which involves alternately hopping on either foot, there is enough mental co-ordination to learn tying or writing. Many teachers use the ability to skip as a rule of thumb guide to what a child is ready for. The rule is that gross motor precedes fine motor co-ordination. A teacher I know used to say "Before you give a pencil, give a broom." Happy is the child who is free to sweep the floor in his own house, or gather the leaves in the garden. As they learn how to become a person, our children enjoy imitating everything that we adults do.

Sense of Order

A child's sense of order is not like ours. Children need to have consistency or sameness in their surroundings and in their daily routines. This kind of order helps to reinforce their understanding of the world and of what is happening around them. In this sense, the child prefers sameness to change. In fact, he prefers everything to be the same from one day to the next.

The child who protests when someone else occupies his seat in the car, or at the table, is telling us that his sense of order has been violated. Many children feel upset when the family moves to a new house or when they start preschool. The whole order of the world is changed, and they feel insecure. Relocating your four year old to a new bedroom because there is a new baby in the house can be a traumatic event. Not only are the daily routines gone, but his old bed is gone and his familiar furniture! A tragic situation!

What we can do is to involve the child in making the change with us. If there has to be new furniture bring him to the furniture store and share your choices with him. Even if we need to move around the furniture in the living room, involve the child in physically moving the furniture. Better yet, leave the furniture alone for awhile until this particular need has passed.

Chapter 3 *The Thinker: Five Years Old. – Summary of cognitive development*

Let us begin our picture of the five year old by reviewing where this young person has come from. The baby must act in order to understand. The newborn lives and loves and learns through the mouth. Everything gets popped in there as the first step to getting acquainted – fingers, the thumb, pebbles, telephone cords, the wood floor. Babies are so egocentric that when they are wet, the whole world feels wet to them.

Piaget calls this the sensori-motor period, meaning that the baby gets to know the world through sense impressions and through her own action upon things. She absorbs impressions and experiments incessantly. She is like a sponge – everything is unconsciously absorbed. Only at the end of the toddler period does she become more consciously aware of the world around her. Awareness of other people and things lowers the level of egocentricity. Sharing is still very hard. Sharing a toy is like cutting off the young child's arm. She does not quite know where the arm ends and the toy begins.

At the same time she needs to be loved and to give love. Parents are needed by human children for a very long time in comparison with the childhood of other animals.

The pre-school child is better equipped to deal with the real world. She plays with real objects – the more real the better, she structures and re-structures her mental images of the world, but reality is always the focus.

Fantasy and Reality

Pre-school age is a long intermediate period when the child is

not fully aware of the distinction between what is real and what is fantasy, desires and dreams. When we parents understand this we can become more tolerant of our child's unreasonable fears, her fantasies and her outright falsehoods. If you ever play cards with a young child you will make a discovery. She cheats! They all cheat! Their need to win is an overwhelming compulsion, and truth and fairness get lost in the shuffle.

There is no such thing as a four or five year old liar. Lying requires an intention to deceive and that is not the intention here. If your child believes, as she will tell you, that the sun, moon and stars rise and set for her personal convenience, it is a very small step to be convinced that "This toy is mine" - because I really want it; or "I did not break the window" – because I did not want to break it.

One Spring day I noticed my five year old sitting by the window, watching the trees very intently. She was quietly tapping her head with the heel of the hand and saying "Look, they're moving." When she saw me she said ""Look at the trees, they're moving." She kept tapping her head to reinforce her impression. Being a mere adult I had to say "It seems to me they're well rooted in the ground." But, like Galileo, she murmured fiercely "Still, they're moving." Eppur si muove.

In later childhood years I would remind her of this and she always laughed and said "Now I know the trees don't move."

What is Reality?

But children are not the only ones deceived by sense impressions.

A few years ago, my wife and I were driving to Indianapolis from Chicago very early in the morning. We turned into a diner to get some breakfast. The waitress asked "Orange juice?" "Yes" we said. "Large or small?" The large cost an extra 50¢; I chose the large, Celma chose the small. When the juice arrived, we noticed that the 'large' juice came in a tall thin glass and Celma's small juice was in a short fat glass. A few days before, we had been using Piaget's tests of the young child's ability to conserve quantity and volume, so, just from curiosity, I asked the waitress to bring anoth-

er empty "small" glass. When she did, I poured the juice from my tall thin glass into the short fat glass. It fit exactly! The waitress was astonished and apologetic, and only charged me for the "small" orange juice. The question occurred to me – was there some smart operator running this operation and deliberately bilking the customers? Does a tall thin glass deceive them? Maybe, but when you demonstrate as I did, that the quantities were the same, the adult's reasoning powers tell him this is so, in spite of his sense-impression. The pre-schooler, given the same demonstration would just say "Now they're the same, but when you pour it into the tall glass, then there's more juice!"

The pre-schooler is captivated by the sense impression of tallness and cannot reason herself away from it. And this may well be a child with great command of language, someone who can read and write at an appropriate level. It's not a matter of being smart, it is simply that the ability to reason is not fully developed yet.

Learning the Tools

But she is able to master many of the tools of living and learning, writing, reading, working with quantities and number, using a computer. Have a mailbox or bulletin board where your child can leave written messages or where you can write 'secret' messages to her. It is a short step to writing E-mail messages for distant family members and waiting to see what they send back.

Involve your child in associating quantity and number by counting the number of people who will sit at the table and bringing to the table the right amount of plates, cups, knives and forks. Going to school in the morning have your pre- schooler count cars of a particular type, or prepare change for the toll.

Art and Music

The young child's thinking is still intuitive and artistic - long on feelings, short on reasoning. It is the kind of thinking that adult artists try to cultivate, different from ordinary adult reasoning. As the child's fine motor abilities become more refined, this is the time to encourage all kinds of artistic expression. Our observation of the child's skills and interests is crucial. Availability of facilities and

tutoring can affect our choice. Many great artists, sports stars and musicians can trace the beginning of their careers to this period and the encouragement of a perceptive parent. A patient, observant, non-pushy approach will often uncover a hidden talent. If we do turn out to have a talented child it is important to provide steady encouragement without forcing. Stress can happen to children because of parental pressure, and while we can challenge our child to excel, we must remember that she is still a child and needs time to watch the clouds go by.

Developing a Second Language

Parents who work with their children to develop a second language may feel disappointed that although the children understand, they do not speak it. The problem is usually the lack of a local community where the language is spoken. Now is a good age to visit the country with your child, giving him time to accustom himself to a different culture, with strange food and different attitudes to children. He needs your support during this transition so that he will emerge from the experience happy to have links with a different part of the world, and the ability to speak its language. Having access to another culture through its language is an enrichment for anybody. Even monoglot parents can introduce their child to a second language, because in our world culture it is becoming necessary to work easily with speakers of other languages. In the United States professional people who can speak Spanish find that it adds a new dimension of flexibility and understanding to the service they provide to a good portion of their clients.

The Mother Tongue

As our child becomes more aware we can help to refine his command of language. Humorous poetry is one way to begin

"Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear
Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair
Fuzzy Wuzzy wasn't fuzzy, was he?"

Songs like "I'm being swallowed by a boa constrictor" or

"There was an old woman who swallowed a fly," somehow always delight each generation of children. Dr. Seuss, too is a wonderful resource. How many children are enthralled by the sounds of the Zizzer-Zazzer-Zoo or the Cat in the Hat!

On a more serious note there are excellent books of poetry for children available, and stories performed on tape by professional artists. Even for adults it is worth hearing what Shel Silverstein does with "A light in the attic."

The words of the folk songs and sea-shanties you have been singing since your child was a toddler are now just as important as the music. Get a book and learn the words that come after the first line or two, or, better still, get some tapes so that you can sing them along with your five year old.

The window of opportunity for language remains open but gets narrower with each passing year. There is a great deal of linguistic junk out there to take your pre-schooler's attention – commercial jingles, the "Have a great day" kind of cliché. Try to make sure that your own speech is rich and idiosyncratic, and that what you read with your child gives him a lifelong thirst for the joys to be found in good literature.

Going to the Library

Which brings us, naturally, to the library. While libraries remain repositories of books, where books are borrowed every day, they are also moving with the times. In many libraries today you can find an author discussing his latest book, you can check out reproductions of many famous works of art, as well as videos, tapes, and media equipment. My local library has sessions during school holidays where young children can hear stories, read by the librarians, followed by a discussion. There is also a room reserved for high school students where they can get access to reference material needed for their homework.

This is the ideal time to get a library card for your pre-schooler and explore with him what your local library offers. You cannot yet depend on your child to return any books borrowed on time, so once a week you will need to collect the books to be returned before he checks out any new books or tapes.

Other Resources

Other resources that we can explore with our pre-schooler are zoos, art museums, historical museums, children's concerts, and dance festivals. The visit itself should generally be short – an hour or less – and we should try to highlight in advance what is to be the focus of the visit. "I think you would really enjoy seeing the lions," or "I want to show you the paintings of Renoir – here are some reproductions." A little preparation on our part pays big dividends. If your visit takes you to a new city or part of a city, do not forget to explore other features. "I love going to the Milwaukee Zoo. Let's go to a German restaurant after the zoo."

Summary of the pre-schoolers development

During the pre-school years the pace of development slows down. There is consolidation and refinement of speech and motor development. The child can learn to read and write if given the proper environment. Self-control is firmly established. At various times the lover, the worker and the thinker predominate. Fears, an interest in gender differences, and friendships characterize the emotional life. Thinking is intuitive, non-reasoning, until the end of the period, when reasoning takes over.

What we can do

Support our child's friendships and growing independence. Take fears seriously, satisfy basic curiosity about sex by answering questions factually, without elaboration. Be prepared to make changes in our lives to reduce stress. Establish workable routines. Take vacations with children if possible. Ground-rules are established, discussed and reinforced, but in a gentle, positive way. We adapt our house for the child's use, and provide good activities. We are like apprentice- masters and model our best behavior. The child will work at his own self- construction. We provide a stimulating environment. We can help him to read, we can take him to the park and for swimming lessons, we can minimize time spent with TV. We understand the limits on our child's thinking, before reasoning develops.

III

School Years – Getting Down To Work

Chapter 1 *The Leader – The six year old.*

Working In Groups

This age marks another time of transition. Emotionally the child is more mature and independent. He feels able to go with his group all around the neighborhood. Boys prefer to play with boys; girls show a marked preference for the company of girls. Balance is better, so a bicycle is the vehicle of choice, opening up the world for "adventures".

Intuitive thinking slowly gives way to reasoning. Ground rules are no longer accepted just as they are. Now there has to be discussion. "Eight o'clock is too early for bed. Billy doesn't go till ten o'clock." "Mary has a TV in her bedroom. Why can't I?"

The child is acquiring the tools for life as an adult – the ability to discuss how life is to be lived, cooperation with others on an equal footing, practical skills like riding a bike and finding directions. Erickson explains the identification with one's own sex as the boy identifying with his father (or father figures in his life) and the girl identifying with her mother.

He calls the 6-12 age-span the Latency Period, when no strong emotional urges are at work in the child. Learning how to do things, like how to keep score at a ball game of any kind, how to mend a bicycle tire, or change the wheel of a car - all of these become important. Justice and fairness are the big values and the first people to be tested are Mom and Dad. The old ground rules will not work any more. New ones must be worked out with a great deal of discussion and explanation. We adults have to recognize our child's new maturity and be prepared for a more equal dialogue, with the possibility of compromise and concession at times.

Now the group begins to take over some of the parental func-

tion. Friendships are a necessity of life and our child will give a great deal to retain the friendship of those she esteems. Leadership emerges, and the more assertive children will be very visible, leading games like 'follow the leader' or 'capture the flag.' Having games skills like swimming or tennis, ice-skating or ice-hockey assume a new importance. As parents, our role becomes more that of emotional support, and helping our child to develop those skills that he wishes to pursue.

The Transition to Reasoning

How can you know if your child has made the transition to reasoning? It can occur anytime between ages five and seven, and takes a little time. There is a real perceptible difference between the seven year old who is reasoning and the pre-schooler who is not there yet. Age is only one factor in the change – experience, social interaction with other children, being stimulated to think for oneself, all play a part. Piaget and Montessori always opposed the urge to hurry children through their earlier stages to arrive more quickly at the stage of reasoning. Piaget was once asked "How is it that it takes a baby two years to reach the stage of co-ordination reached by a kitten in three months?" Piaget gave a long answer which I paraphrase here – The kitten, you see, is going no further! The baby on the other hand is laying the foundations for the later stages of reasoning, abstract thought, and perhaps this is why it takes so long.

Piaget gives some tests for estimating the reasoning powers of the child in the transition period, e.g. get two balls of clay, show them to the child and have her weigh them with her hands, and agree that they have the same amount of clay in each. If necessary, let her take some from one and add it to the other. Then roll one ball between your hands to make a long sausage shape, while the child watches. Now ask "Do both of these have the same amount of clay, or does one have more than the other?" The pre-reasoning child will usually opt for the sausage shape as having more clay. Then roll the sausage back into a ball and ask the same question. The pre-reasoning child will answer something like "Now they're the same again," and will see no contradiction in her answers. The

child who has made the transition to reasoning will realize that nothing is added or taken away when one ball is squeezed into a sausage shape, and will answer accordingly.

Telling a fairly complicated story and asking the child to repeat it back to you; asking the child to give directions from home to school, are other tests – the pre-reasoning child gets lost in the sequence. Being able to read a story for the meaning, being able to observe an animal with some detachment, instead of "I love my bunny," these are indicators of a reasoning child. It's a little like learning to ride a bicycle. Reasoning is a trick that some master at age five and others not until age eight, and they are all perfectly within the range of normality.

The Reasoning Child

Once your child is able to reason, all our expectations change. Go back and look at the chart of Sensitive Periods. Except for language and music, which linger on for another while, although less intensely, they are gone. Whatever could be accomplished by the child is now a part of him. Early childhood, with all its extra helps and its emotional roller-coasters, is over. It is time to re-evaluate.

For one thing, a whole new attitude to the electronic media is in order. TV, videos and computers, especially the latter, become tools for growth. The objective is to help our child become an interactive participant, not the proverbial couch potato. New interactive games are introduced every year – your child needs some acquaintance with them if she is to lead a normal social life. But think of the tools for life approach. This is the ideal age to learn keyboarding or touch-typing. There are many programs for helping with this. It is not asking too much to tell your child "No games today till you complete one lesson of your keyboard program." This is a skill that our children will need for their whole lives. Not enough grade schools offer the kind of hands-on teaching that works best for young children. If we do not demand it of our child it may never get done, and she will limp along with her hunt and peck approach to keyboarding, which would be a pity.

Now when you choose video, TV or computer programs with your child be prepared for discussions about what criteria are to be

used in the choices. She is not too young to hear about moral integrity, artistic integrity and other things that concern all of humankind – saving the environment, promoting non-violence.

Sharing our values with our children imposes on us the obligation of living up to them. But who said parenting is easy?

No Competition Yet

Six years old means that your child is beginning to acquire the tools for life. Mastery of reading, writing, computing and number skills are just a part of this. The sports and games that our child learns now are important for his friendships and his whole approach to life. When we think of sports, we tend to think of professional sports – the Monsters of the Midway grinding each other to pieces on the football field - but just for now, think smaller, think of this little boy or girl, not yet ready for competition, who looks up to sports stars as heroes but still needs a lower basketball hoop. Just for now, skiing, swimming, running, learning to hit a ball with a bat or a racquet is as far as he needs to go. Soccer is great for young boys and girls and can easily be played in a non-competitive way. Indoor games and skills are also useful – martial arts,, board games like chess and checkers, card games – there are some games somewhere, where your child can learn the life-skills that he needs.

No matter which games your child prefers now, try to steer him towards one or two skills that he can practice for a lifetime.

Chapter 2 *School Age – Age 7 to 12*

Role of the Parent

As parents, our role becomes more that of emotional support, and helping our child to develop those skills that he wishes to pursue. Having a home where your child's friends feel secure, and happy to come and go, perhaps to raid the refrigerator now and then, confers a great benefit on your own child. Being the soccer or Junior League coach or a volunteer parent at your child's school, also reflects well on your child.

Seven year olds begin to compare themselves with other children, but they are not yet emotionally ready for full-blown competition. Losing is too traumatic, too destructive of self-esteem. It is better to put competitive games off at least until age eight or nine. Play it by ear.

Accepting your child as he is, helping him to use whatever talents he has, encouraging him to take part in games and other group activities and letting him know that he is loved and esteemed not for his achievements but for himself – this all requires that we be present with our child during his school years.

The child has laid the foundation for his reasoning powers through six years of hard work, helped by the environment we have provided. Reasoning is now one of his basic tools for life. Others are the ability to read and write, the ability to play with numbers and quantity, the ability to sing and dance and play games of skill. He can find his way to school and the local library and knows how to pick out good literature and evaluate what the media offers in terms of moral and artistic values.

In other words, our apprentice is doing well and we can entrust him with greater responsibility.

Being Active in Our Child's School

As our child goes to school full-time we need to be active parents in our local school meetings and P.T.A. board. It is somewhat frustrating to realize that although the educational establishment pays lip-service to the contributions of great thinkers like Plato, or Piaget in our own times, it continues to ignore their conclusions to a very large extent. Let us hope that the new discoveries of neuroscience concerning brain development in young children will have more impact.

Children of grade school age are not ready for abstract thinking yet we continue to teach math concepts at a highly abstract level, instead of using the hands-on concrete materials developed by Froebel, Montessori, Cuisinaire and many others. The same could be said for abstract concepts like historical time and geographical space. Children can easily learn these concepts but only if we start with concrete materials. Only when we parents back up

the scientists and educational researchers and findings by demanding hands-on materials and in-service training in their use, will teachers create true educational reform; and we will have the support of the best and brightest of the teachers. We can ask what has happened to musical training, (that Plato recognized, two thousand years ago, as "the most potent instrument for education,") and training in the arts generally.

The teaching of second languages beginning in junior high, about age 12 or 13, is probably the greatest display of educational ineptitude in our public school systems. There are signs of hope that change in these areas is coming e.g. a recent movie called "Mr. Holland's Opus" about musical education. We have to hope that these changes occur soon enough to help this generation of children. Our taxes are paying the public piper. Why can we not call the tune?

The Parent as Educator

In our own homes, let us realize that we are still the first (and best) educators of our child. She is fascinated by all kinds of knowledge – how things work, cars, airplanes, computers, the human body and brain, different forms of energy, ecosystems, almost anything in the natural sciences. Introducing her to this knowledge in a hands-on kind of way, using the resources of libraries, science museums and children's museums, is a part of our task.

At the same time, we need to spend time with our grade school child making sure that basic math concepts like place – value, subtraction and division are fully grasped, as well as reading comprehension and the function of words. When she feels at home with the basic concepts, life at school can be fun. You can "concretize" math concepts by using beads, buttons or even pebbles to play games with addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. No child should ever use a calculator until the underlying concepts are understood.

Having some basic educational tools at home is another big help – a junior encyclopedia – now available on computer – a world atlas, and plenty of good story books with fascinating tales

of adventure. Now is the time to feed the imagination.

Religious and ethical values will seldom be acquired in school alone, unless reinforced at home. Even religiously based schools will admit that the parent's role in getting across religious and human values is primary. Your child has a good base in his strong belief in fairness, justice and equality. We can build on this through patient discussion of ground-rules, curfews, attitudes to the media, attitudes to friends and the families of friends. Putting forth our values in a clear fashion that is not coercive or authoritarian is our best teaching tool. Asking our child to share, or at least sympathize with, our concern for her physical and moral safety is a good way to begin.

Broadening Interests and Making Learning Real

Some years ago our work brought us to Cairo in Egypt, to visit a school and give some talks to teachers there. We used this occasion to bring our children along; one was eleven, the other nine years old. They were eager to see the Pyramids and the Sphinx, and they dragged us to see the great museum which houses Tutankhamen and so much besides of early Egyptian history. It appeared that our children had a teacher in school who introduced them in a very concrete and real way to an understanding of early Egypt. They had seen movies on the work of the early archaeologists, pictures of the great historic sites, and had had an immersion course in Egyptian culture.

I was impressed with two things – first, the depth and quality of the teaching they had received, and second, the receptivity of the children and how they just could not get enough of learning.

When we can connect what our children learn in school with what is in the real world we give a concrete demonstration that they can get involved in and enjoy what they can learn. When a child is studying Spanish, a vacation in Spain or Mexico can make his classes more real. This is especially true if we leave the tourist hotels where English is spoken, and get out into the market places and the countryside where one needs to speak Spanish because that is the only useful language. Seeing movies and television

news in Spanish should also be a regular supplement to any Spanish course.

Things Schools Do Not Teach

Other cultures and specialized interests are things we need to share with our children or at least introduce them to, by every means in our power. Sports like swimming and diving are easily available. Scuba diving might involve more difficulty, but it can introduce the older child to an interest in marine life. Interest in the outdoors is easy to cultivate, but birdwatching is more specialized. Photography for snapshots is easy, photography as an art is fascinating but requires commitment. Computers in the sense of word processing and games are rather easy. Becoming an expert on computers, able to create programs and teach skills to others, takes more effort. Having introduced your child to computers you may well find that she later becomes your tutor!

Sometimes the specialized interest can lead a young person into a fascinating career or a lifetime hobby. The important thing is that our children can count on us as a useful resource and a stimulating and challenging mentor.

Chapter 3 *The Home Environment*

The home of the school age child should also reflect his broadening interests and capacities. To a large extent we parents live through our children, even though our lives as adults may be fulfilling and challenging. The child should be able to count on us to receive his friends in a way that is friendly and objective. At the same time we have a right to insist on the same standards of behavior from his friends that our own child observes. Seeing his friends through our eyes can often help our child to take a fresh look at them, and discriminate the good from the not so good. "That Josh may be a very nice guy, but what a mouth!" or "Mary is such a nice person. I wonder why she speaks badly about all your other friends?"

Sharing our interests with our children is like throwing open for them the windows to the world.

Mealtimes

It becomes more difficult to get the whole family together at mealtimes, but within the limitations of conflicting schedules it is an effort worth making. Making sure that mealtimes are happy occasions means controlling our impulse to speak of lapses in behavior during mealtime, and giving everyone a chance to choose their favorite foods. Using large serving dishes and letting young people help themselves gives them the freedom and responsibility that they enjoy exercising. Having a few useful topics handy, and tactfully putting an end to siblings teasing each other, is a skill that many parents need to develop at this time.

Discussions – Family meetings

Clear requirements in regard to common living areas reduce tension. When can one watch TV? Who controls the remote control? What time is bed-time? Special requirements for week-ends? Having a weekly family get-together, preferably around the table after a good meal, to discuss these kinds of questions is needed if we are all to lead a harmonious life. Just to put everyone's schedules together, and decide who can do which chore, can be a major task in logistics – who will drive Karen to her ballet lessons? How will Michael get to his ball game at 4:00, and who will bring him home in time for dinner? Mom will be out of town for all of Tuesday; Jodi has a dentist appointment next Saturday morning. A weekly meeting, well prepared by Mom or Dad, helps to share the burdens and responsibilities, and avoid unpleasant surprises. Above all, the family meeting is to share information about what is happening, to discuss needs, plan events and vacations, and to help balance everybody's rights and responsibilities.

The Child's Room

By the time the child is nine, he should be responsible for the order of his room, with at least weekly oversight by one or both

parents. We need to be sure that there is enough storage space for books, games and toys, as well as clearly marked spaces for storing and hanging clothes. A desk and a reading lamp, a place for pursuing a valued hobby and a bunk bed or trundle bed for having the occasional friend sleeping over, also come to mind. It is a good idea around ten or eleven years of age to ask the young person to help you decorate, and, if funds allow, refurnish the room. Ownership of the decoration scheme is a stimulant to taking responsibility for the room and for one's own life. It can even open the way to self-discovery. Being prepared to tone down loud music, take care of a pet, do some chores for the whole family, are ways in which the young person learns how to be a member of a living, breathing community, and be independent and responsible. Our apprentice is advancing in his profession, learning what it is to be a good human being, and face the struggles of life with courage, compassion and a sense of humor.

Psychologists tell us that to know and understand another person at a deep and intimate level is an experience that enriches and completes us as human beings. My belief is that to know and understand our children in their infinite variety and uniqueness is an enriching experience in the lives of most adults. We not only get to know and love them, but we are, as it were, present in the act of continuing the creation which child-rearing is. It is a demanding relationship, but every love relationship makes its demands, and changes those who love. Like the Skin Horse in "The Velveteen Rabbit, we lose our fur and our rough edges get worn away, but when we love and are loved we become real. Who could ask for more?

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